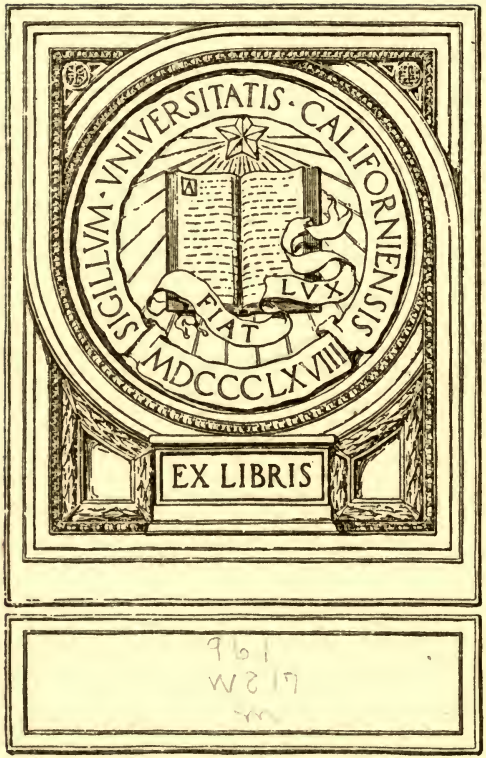
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"Pie like mother made," said Scipio

MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

BY

OWEN WISTER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY H. T. DUNN

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1911

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TO MY
MOTHER

Norwood Press
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Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

To

HORACE HOWARD FURNESS

OF LINDENSHADE, WALLINGFORD

That is my home of love: if I have rang'd,
Like him that travels, I return again.
— SONNET CIX.

218750

PREFACE

When this October comes, twenty years will be sped since the author of these Western tales sat down one evening to begin his first tale of the West, and — will you forgive him a preamble of gossip, of retrospection? Time steps in between the now that is and the then that was with a vengeance; it blocks the way for us all; we cannot go back. When the old corner, the old place, the old house, wear the remembered look, beckon to the memory as if to say, No change here! then verily is the change worst, the shell most empty, the cheat well-nigh too piercing. In a certain garden I used to plunder in 1866, the smell to-day of warm, dusty strawberries. . . . But did we admit to our companionship ghosts only, what would living be? I continue to eat strawberries. As for smells, they're worse than old melodies, I think. Lately I was the sport of one. My train was trundling over the plains — a true train of the past, half freight, half passenger, cars of an obsolete build, big smoke-stack on the archaic engine, stops for meals, inveterate news-boy with bad candy, bad novels, bad bananas — a dear old horrible train, when magic was suddenly wrought. It came in

through the open window, its wand touched me, and the evoked spirits rose. With closed eyes I saw them once more, standing there out in the alkali, the antelope by scores and hundreds, only a little way off, a sort of color between cinnamon and amber in the morning sun, transparent and phantom-like, with pale legs. Only a little way off. Eyes closed, I watched them, as in 1885 with open ones I beheld them first from the train. Now they were running; I saw the bobbing dots of their white receding rears, and through me passed the ghost of that first thrill at first seeing antelope yesterday — it seemed yesterday: only a little way off. I opened my eyes; there was the train as it ought to look, there were the plains, the alkali, the dry gullies, the mounds, the flats, the enormous sunlight, the virgin air like the first five measures of *Lohengrin* — but where were the antelope? So natural did everything continue to look, surely they must be just over that next rise! No; over the one beyond that? No; only a little, little way off, but gone for evermore! And magic smote me once again through the window. Thousands of cattle were there, with horsemen. Were they not there? Not over the next rise? No; gone for evermore. What was this magic that came in through the window? The smell of the sage-brush. After several years it was greeting me again. All day long it breathed a welcome and a sigh, as if the desert whispered: Yes, I look as if I were here;

but I am a ghost, too, there's no coming back. All day long the whiffs of sage-brush conjured old sights before me, till my heart ran over with homesickness for what was no more, and the desert seemed to whisper: It's not I you're seeking, you're straining your eyes to see yourself, — you as you were in your early twenties, with your illusion that I, the happy hunting-ground of your young irresponsibility, was going to be permanent. You must shut your eyes to see yourself and me and the antelope as we all used to be. Why, if Adam and Eve had evaded the angel and got back into the garden, do you think they would have found it the same after Cain and Abel? Thus moralized the desert, and I thought, How many things we have to shut our eyes to see!

Permanent! Living men, not very old yet, have seen the Indian on the war-path, the buffalo stopping the train, the cow-boy driving his cattle, the herder watching his sheep, the government irrigation dam, and the automobile — have seen every one of these slides which progress puts for a moment into its magic-lantern and removes to replace with a new one. The final tale in this book could not possibly have happened in the day of the first tale, although scarcely twenty years separate the new, present Wyoming from that cow-boy Wyoming which then flourished so boisterously, and is now like the antelope. Steam and electricity make short work of epochs. We

don't know how many centuries the Indian and the buffalo enjoyed before the trapper and pioneer arrived. These latter had fifty or sixty good years of it, pushing westward until no west was left to push to; a little beyond Ogden in 1869, the driving of that golden spike which riveted the rails between New York and San Francisco, rang out the old, rang in the new, and progress began to work its magic-lantern faster. The soldier of the frontier, the frontier post — gone; the cattle-range — gone; the sheep episode just come, yet going already, or at any rate already mixed, diluted, with the farm, the truck garden, the poultry yard, the wife, the telephone, the summer boarder, and the Victor playing the latest Broadway "records" in valleys where the august wilderness reigned silent — yesterday. The nomadic, bachelor West is over, the housed, married West is established. This rush of change, this speed we live at everywhere (only faster in some places than in others) has led some one to remark sententiously that when a Western baby is born, it immediately makes its will, while when a New York baby is born, it merely applies for a divorce.

But what changes can ever efface that early vision which began with the antelope? Wyoming burst upon the tenderfoot resplendent, like all the story-books, like Cooper and Irving and Parkman come true again; here, actually going on, was that something which the boy runs away

from school to find, that land safe and far from Monday morning, nine o'clock, and the spelling-book; here was Saturday eternal, where you slept out-of-doors, hunted big animals, rode a horse, roped steers, and wore deadly weapons. Make no mistake: fire-arms were at times practical and imperative, but this was not the whole reason for sporting them on your hip; you had escaped from civilization's schoolroom, an air never breathed before filled your lungs, and you were become one large shout of joy. College-boy, farm-boy, street-boy, this West melted you all down to the same first principles. Were you seeking fortune? Perhaps, incidentally, but money was not the point; you had escaped from school. This holiday was leavened by hard bodily work, manly deeds, and deeds heroic, and beneath all the bright brave ripple moved the ground-swell of tragedy. Something of promise, also, was in the air, promise of a democracy which the East had missed: —

"With no spread-eagle brag do I gather conviction each year that we Americans, judged not hastily, are sound at heart, kind, courageous, often of the truest delicacy, and always ultimately of excellent good sense. With such belief, or, rather, knowledge, it is sorrowful to see our fatal complacence, our as yet undisciplined folly, in sending to our State Legislatures and to that general business office of ours at Washington, a herd of mismanagers that seems each year

to grow more inefficient and contemptible, whether branded Republican or Democrat. But I take heart, because oftener and oftener I hear upon my journey the citizens high and low muttering, 'There's too much politics in this country'; and we shake hands."

Such "insurgent" sentiments did I in 1895, some time before insurgency's day, speak out in the preface to my first book of Western tales; to-day my faith begins to be justified. In the West, where the heart of our country has been this long while, and where the head may be pretty soon, the citizens are awakening to the fact that our first century of "self" government merely substituted the divine right of corporations for the divine right of Kings. Surprising it is not, that a people whose genius for machinery has always been paramount should expect more from constitutions and institutions than these mere mechanisms of government can of themselves perform; the initiative, referendum, and recall are excellent inventions, but if left to run alone, as all our other patent devices have been, they will grind out nothing for us: By his very creed is the American dedicated to eternal vigilance. This we forgot for so long that learning it anew is both painful and slow. We have further to remember that prosperity is something of a curse in disguise; it is the poor governments in history that have always been the purest; where there is much to steal, there will be many

to steal it. We must discern, too, the illusion of "natural rights," once an inspiration, now a shell from which life has passed on into new formulas. A "right" has no existence, save in its potential exercise; it does not proceed from within, it is permitted from without, and "natural rights" is a phrase empty of other meaning than to denote whatever primitive or acquired inclinations of man each individual is by common consent allowed to realize. These permissions have varied, and will vary, with the ages. Polygamy would be called a natural right now in some parts of the world; to the criminal and the diseased one wife will presently be forbidden in many places. Let this single illustration serve. No argument based upon the dogmatic premise of natural rights can end anywhere save in drifting fog. We see this whenever a meeting of anarchists leads a judge or an editor into the trap of attempting to define the "right" of free speech. In fact, all government, all liberty, reduces itself to one man saying to another: You may do *this;* but if you do *that*, I will kill you. This power Democracy vests in "the people," and our final lesson to learn is that in a Democracy there is no such separate thing as "the people"; all of us are the people. Truly his creed compels the American to eternal vigilance! Will he learn to live up to it?

From the West the tenderfoot took home with him the health he had sought, and an enthusiasm

his friends fled from; what was Wyoming to them or they to Wyoming? In 1885 the Eastern notion of the West was "Alkali Ike" and smoking pistols. No kind of serious art had presented the frontier as yet. Fresh visits but served to deepen the tenderfoot's enthusiasm and whet his impatience that so much splendid indigenous material should literally be wasting its sweetness on the desert air. It is likely always to be true that in each hundred of mankind ninety-nine can see nothing new until the hundredth shakes it in their faces — and he must keep shaking it. No plan of shaking was yet in the tenderfoot's mind, he was dedicated to other calling; but he besieged the ears of our great painter and our great novelist. He told the painter of the strong, strange shapes of the buttes, the epic landscape, the color, the marvellous light, the red men blanketed, the white men in chapareros, the little bronze Indian children; particularly does he recall — in 1887 or 1888 — an occasion about two o'clock in the morning in a certain beloved club in Boston, when he had been preaching to the painter. A lesser painter (he is long dead) sat by, unbelieving. No, he said, don't go. I'm sure it's all crude, repulsive, no beauty. But John Sargent did believe. Other work waited him; his path lay elsewhere, he said, but he was sure the tenderfoot spoke truth. Other work awaited the novelist, too; both painter and novelist were wiser than to leave what they knew to

be their own for unknown fields. But would no one, then, disperse the Alkali Ikes and bring the West into American art and letters?

It was a happy day for the tenderfoot when he read the first sage-brush story by Mary Hallock Foote. At last a voice was lifted to honor the cattle country and not to libel it. Almost at the same moment Charles King opened for us the door upon frontier military life. He brought spirited army scenes to our ken, Mrs. Foote more generally clothed the civilian frontier with serious and tender art. They (so far as I know) were the first that ever burst into that silent sea. Next, Mr. Roosevelt began to publish his vivid, robust accounts of Montana life. But words alone, no matter how skilfully used, were not of themselves adequate to present to the public a picture so strange and new. Another art was needed, and most luckily the man with the seeing eye and shaping hand arrived.

A monument to Frederic Remington will undoubtedly rise some day; the artist who more than any one has gathered up in a grand grasp an entire era of this country's history, and handed it down visible, living, picturesque, for coming generations to see—such man will have a monument. But in the manner of commemorating national benefactors, I would we resembled the French who celebrate their great ones—not soldiers and statesmen alone, but all their great ones—by naming public places in their honor:

the Quai Voltaire, the Rue Bizet, the Rue Auber—to mention the first that come to memory. Everywhere in France you will meet with these instances of a good custom. In this country we seem to value even third-rate politicians more than first-rate men of art and letters. If Paris can by her streets perpetuate the memory of the composers of *Carmen* and *Fra Diavolo*, would it not be fitting that Denver, Cheyenne, Tucson, and other western cities, should have a Remington street? I am glad I did not wait until he was dead to pay my tribute to him. The two opportunities that came to me in his life I took, nor has my opinion of his work changed since then. If he never quite found himself in color, he was an incomparable draftsman; best of all, he was a great wholesome force making for independence, and he taught to our over-imitative American painters the needed lesson that their own country furnishes subjects as worthy as any that Delacroix or Millet ever saw. I have lived to see what I did not expect, the desert on canvas; for which I thank Fernand Lungren. Tributes to the dead seem late to me, and I shall take this chance to acknowledge my debt to some more of the living.

Four years after that night vigil with Sargent, the tenderfoot had still written no word about the West. It was in 1891, after repeated sojournings in camp, ranch, and military post, that his [illegible]ation with the whole thing ran over, so to

speak, in the form of fiction. Writing had been a constant pastime since the school paper; in 1884 Mr. Howells (how kind he was!) had felt my literary pulse and pronounced it promising; a quickening came from the pages of Stevenson; a far stronger shove next from the genius of *Plain Tales from the Hills*; during an unusually long and broad wandering through the Platte valley, Powder River, Buffalo, Cheyenne, Fort Washakie, Jackson's Hole, and the Park, the final push happened to be given by Prosper Mérimée; I had the volume containing *Carmen* with me. After reading it in the Park I straightway invented a traveller's tale. This was written down after I got home—I left some good company at a club dinner table one night to go off to a lonely library and begin it. A second followed, both were sent to Franklin Square and accepted by Mr. Alden. Then I found my pretty faithfully-kept Western diaries (they would now fill a shelf) to be a reservoir of suggestion—and at times a source of despair; as, for instance, when I unearthed the following abbreviations: Be sure to remember Green-hides—perpendicular—sediment—Tuesdays as a rule.

Aware of Merimée's not highly expansive nature, I should hesitate, were he alive, to disclose my debt to his *Carmen* — my favorite of all short stories; but Mr. Howells and Mr. Kipling will be indulgent, and there is another who will have to bear with my gratitude. In 1896

I sat with him and he went over my first book, patiently, minutely pointing out many things. Everything that he said I could repeat this moment, and his own pages have continued to give me hints without end. That the pupil in one or two matters ventures to disagree with his benefactor may be from much lingering ignorance, or because no two ever think wholly alike: *tot homines quot sententiæ*, as the Latin grammar used so incontrovertibly to remark. It is significant to note how this master seems to be teaching a numerous young generation. Often do I pick up some popular magazine and read a story (or even of murder, it may be, in tropic seas or city slums) where some canny bit of foreshortening, of presentation, reveals the spreading influence, and I say, Ah, my friend, never would you have found out how to do that if Henry James hadn't set you thinking!

It can happen, says Montesquieu, that the individual through pursuing his own welfare contributes to the general good; Mr. Herbert Croly admirably and sagaciously applies this thought to the case of the artist and the writer. Their way to be worthy citizens and serve the State, he says, is to see to it that their work be reverently thorough, for thus they set high the standard of national excellence. To which I would add, that a writer can easily take himself too seriously, but he can never take his art too seriously. In our country, the painter and writer

have far outstripped the working-man in their ideal of honest work. This is (partly) because painter and writer have to turn out a good product to survive, while the working-man manages to survive with the least possible of personal effort and skill. Did I offer my publisher such work as the plumber and carpenter offer me, I should feel myself disgraced. Are we to see the day when the slovenly, lazy poet shall enact that the careful, industrious poet must work no longer and sell no more than he?

Editors have at times lamented to me that good work isn't distinguished from bad by our multifarious millions. I have the happiness to know the editors to be wrong. Let the subject of a piece of fiction contain a simple, broad appeal, and the better its art, the greater its success; although the noble army of readers will not suspect that their pleasure is largely due to the skill. Such a book as *The Egoist*, where the subject is rarefied and complex, of course no height of art will render acceptable, save to the rehearsed few. Thanks to certain of our more robust editors, the noble army grows daily more rehearsed, reads "harder" books than it did, accepts plainer speech and wider range of subject than the skittish spinster generation of a while ago. But mark here an underlying principle. The plain speech in Richardson was in his day nothing to start back from; to-day it is inhibited by a change in our circumambient reticence.

The circumambient reticence varies in degree with each race, and almost with every generation of each race. Something like a natural law, it sets the limits for what can be said aloud in grown-up company — and Art is speaking aloud in grown-up company; it consists no more of the professional secrets of the doctor than it does of the prattle of the nursery. Its business is indeed to take notice of everything in life, but always subject to the circumambient reticence. Those gentlemen (and ladies) who utter that gaseous shibboleth about Art for Art (as well cry Beefsteak for Beefsteak) and would have our books and plays be foul because Ben Jonson frequently was and Anatole France frequently is, are out of their reckoning; and generally they may be suspected not so much of an abstract passion for truth as of a concrete letch for animalism. Almost the only advice for the beginner is, Clearly feel what you intend to express, and then go ahead, listening to nobody, unless to one who also perceives clearly your intention. Great and small things does this rule fit. Once in an early tale I sought to make our poor alphabet express the sound of cow-bells, and I wrote that they *tankled* on the hillside. In the margin I stated my spelling to be intentional. Back it came in the galley, tinkled. A revised proof being necessary, I restored my word with emphasis — and lo, tinkle was returned me again. I appealed to the veteran and well-loved sage at the head of *Harper's Magazine.* He supported

me. Well, in the new Oxford dictionary, behold Tankle and me, two flies in amber, perpetuated by that Supreme Court; I have coined a new acknowledged word for the English language. This should not be told, but for its small moral, and if I could not render a final set of thanks to the living. Countless blunders have been saved me by the watchful eye of the printer and proofreader, those friends I never see, whose names I do not know. For twenty years they have marked places where through carelessness or fatigue I have slipped; may some of them know through this page that I appreciate their service.

This book is three years late; the first tale designed for it was published in 1901. Its follower should even now be ready. It is not yet begun; it exists merely in notes and intentions. Give me health and a day, sighs Emerson; and I am sorry for all who have to say that. When you see the new moon over your left shoulder, wish always for health; never mind all the other things. I own to an attachment for the members of this family; I would fain follow their lives a little more, into twentieth century Wyoming, which knows not the cowboy, and where the cow-boy feels at times more lost than ever he was on the range. Of all the ills that harass writing, plans deferred seem at times the worst; yet great pleasures offset them — the sight of one's pages in a foreign tongue, meeting horses in the Rocky Mountains named

after the members of one's family, being asked from across the world for further news of some member. Lately a suggestion full of allurement came from one who had read of Sir Francis, the duchess, and the countess, in the *Saturday Evening Post.* (There, by the way, is an intrepid editor!) Why not add, said the reader, a third lady to the group in Jimsy's pond, and see what they would all do then? Only consider the possibilities! But I dare not. Life, without whose gifts none of us could have a story to tell — not even Scheherezadè — life presented to me Sir Francis and his adoring household. Never could I risk trusting to invention in a matter so delicate. Would the duchess and the countess unite to draw the line at the added sister? Would Sir Francis rise to the emergency? and if so, what line would he take? The added sister might prove a lamb, a minx, or a vixen. You see the possibilities. Dearly should I like to return this summer to the singing waters of Buffalo Horn, and place a third lady in that pond of Jimsy's; then we might have another story if others are ever to be. My science in the third tale is of course out of date; since Kelvin, energy is immortal no longer, and a *lower* form of it was transmitted to the Secretary than was originally stored in Captain Stone.

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I

HAPPY-TEETH

Scipio Le Moyne lay in bed, held together with bandages. His body had need for many bandages. A Bar-Circle-Zee three-year-old had done him violent mischief at the forks of Stinking Water.[1] But for the fence, Scipio might have swung clear of the wild, rearing animal. When they lifted his wrecked frame from the ground one of them had said: —

"A spade's all he'll need now."

Overhearing this with some still unconquered piece of his mind, Scipio made one last remark: "I ain't going to die for years and years."

Upon this his head had rolled over, and no further statements came from him for — I forget how long. Yet somehow, we all believed that last remark of his.

"Since I've known him," said the Virginian, "I have found him a truthful man."

[1] Lately changed to Shoshone River by act of legislature. While we miss the old name, derived from certain sulphur springs, we agree that like the Indian and the cow-boy it belongs to the past.

"Which don't mean," Honey Wiggin put in, "that he can't lie when he ought to."

Judge Henry always sent his hurt cow-punchers to the nearest surgical aid, which in this case was the hospital on the reservation. Here then, one afternoon, Scipio lay, his body still bound tight at a number of places, but his brain needing no bandages whatever; he was able to see one friend for a little while each day. It was almost time for this day's visitor to go, and the visitor looked at his watch.

"Oh, don't do that!" pleaded the man in bed. "I'm not sick any more."

"You will be sick some more if you keep talking," replied the Virginian.

"Thinkin' is a heap more dangerous, if y'u can't let it out," Scipio urged. "I'm not half through tellin' y'u about Horacles."

"Did his mother name him that?" inquired the Virginian.

"Naw! but his mother brought it on him. Didn't y'u know? Of course you don't often get so far north in the Basin as the Agency. His name is Horace Pericles Byram. Well, the Agent wasn't going to call his assistant store-clerk all that, y'u know, not even if he *has* got an uncle in

the Senate of the United States. Couldn't spare the time. Days not long enough. Not even in June. So everybody calls him Horacles now. He's reconciled to it. But I ain't. It's too good for him. A heap too good. I've knowed him all my life, and I can't think of a name that's not less foolish than he is. Well, where was I? I was tellin' y'u how back in Gallipol*eece* he couldn't understand anything. Not dogs. Not horses. Not girls."

"Do you understand girls?" the Virginian interrupted.

"Better'n Horacles. Well, now it seems he can't understand Indians. Here he is sellin' goods to 'em across the counter at the Agency store. I could sell twiced what he does, from what they tell me. I guess the Agent has begun to discover what a trick the Uncle played him when he unloaded Horacles on him. Now why did the Uncle do that?"

Scipio stopped in his rambling discourse, and his brows knitted as he began to think about the Uncle. The Virginian once again looked at his watch, but Scipio, deep in his thoughts, did not notice him. "Uncle," he resumed to himself, half aloud, "Uncle was the damnedest scoundrel

in Gallipol*eece.* — Say!" he exclaimed suddenly, and made an eager movement to sit up. "Oh Lord!" he groaned, sinking back. "I forgot. — What's your hurry?"

But the Virginian had seen the pain transfix his friend's face, and though that face had instantly smiled, it was white. He stood up. "I'd ought to get kicked from here to the ranch," he said, remorsefully. "I'll get the doctor."

Vainly the man in bed protested; his visitor was already at the door.

"I've not told y'u about his false teeth!" shrieked Scipio, hoping this would detain him. "And he does tricks with a rabbit and a bowl of fish."

But the guest was gone. In his place presently the Post surgeon came, and was not pleased. Indeed, this excellent army doctor swore. Still, it was not the first time that he had done so, nor did it prove the last; and Scipio, it soon appeared, had given himself no hurt. But in answer to a severe threat, he whined: —

"Oh, ain't y'u goin' to let me see him tomorro'?"

"You'll see nobody to-morrow except me."

"Well, that'll be seein' nobody," whined Scipio, more grievously.

The doctor grinned. "In some ways you're incurable. Better go to sleep now." And he left him.

Scipio did not go to sleep then, though by morning he had slept ten healthful hours, waking with the Uncle still at the centre of his thoughts. It made him again knit his brows.

"No, you can't see him to-day," said the doctor, in reply to a request.

"But I hadn't finished sayin' something to him," Scipio protested. "And I'm well enough to see my dead grandmother."

"That I'll not forbid," answered the doctor. And he added that the Virginian had gone back to Sunk Creek with some horses.

"Oh, yes," said Scipio. "I'd forgot. Well, he'll be coming through on his way to Billings next week. You been up to the Agency lately? Yesterday? Well, there's going to be something new happen. Agent seem worried or anything?"

"Not that I noticed. Are the Indians going on the war-path?"

"Nothing like that. But why does a senator of the United States put his nephew in that store? Y'u needn't to tell me it's to provide for

him, for it don't provide. I thought I had it figured out last night, but Horacles don't fit. I can't make him fit. He don't understand Injuns. That's my trouble. Now the Uncle must know Horacles don't understand. But if he didn't know?" pursued Scipio, and fell to thinking.

"Well," said the doctor indulgently, as he rose, "it's good you can invent these romances. Keeps you from fretting, shut up here alone."

"There'd be no romances here," retorted Scipio. "Uncle is exclusively hard cash." The doctor departed.

At his visit next morning, he was pleased with his patient's condition. "Keep on," said he, "and I'll let you sit up Monday for ten minutes. Any more romances?"

"Been thinkin' of my past life," said Scipio.

The doctor laughed long. "Why, how old are you, anyhow?" he asked at length.

"Oh, there's some lovely years still to come before I'm thirty. But I've got a whole lot of past life, all the same." Then he pointed a solemn, oracular finger at the doctor. "What white man savvys the Injun? Not you. Not me. And I've drifted around some, too. The map of the United States has been my home. Been

in Arizona and New Mexico and among the Siwashes — seen all kinds of Injun — but I don't savvy 'em. I know most any Injun's better'n most any white man till he meets the white man. Not smarter, y'u know, but better. And I do know this: You take an Injun and let him be a warrior and a chief and a grandfather who has killed heaps of white men in his day — but all that don't make him grown up. Not like we're grown up. He stays a child in some respects till he's dead. He'll believe things and be scared at things that ain't nothin' to you and me. You take Old High Bear right on this reservation. He's got hair like snow and eyes like an eagle's and he can sing a war-song about fights that happened when our fathers were kids. But if you want to deal with him, you got to remember he's a child of five."

"I do know all this," said the doctor, interested. "I've not been twenty years on the frontier for nothing."

"Horacles don't know it," said Scipio. "I've saw him in the store all season."

"Well," said the doctor, "see you to-morrow. I've some new patients in the ward."

"Soldiers?"

"Soldiers."

"Guess I know why they're here."

"Oh, yes," sighed the doctor. "You know. Few come here for any other reason." The doctor held views about how a military post should be regulated, which popular sentiment will never share. "Can I do anything for you?" he inquired.

"If I could have some newspapers?" said Scipio.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" said the doctor. After that he saw to it that Scipio had them liberally.

With newspapers the patient sat surrounded deep, when the Virginian, passing north on his way to Billings, looked in for a moment to give his friend the good word. That is what he came for, but what he said was: —

"So he has got false teeth?"

Scipio, hearing the voice at the door, looked over the top of his paper at the visitor.

"Yes," he replied, precisely as if the visitor had never been out of the room.

"What d' y'u know?" inquired the Virginian.

"Nothing; what do you?"

"Nothing."

After all, such brief greetings cover the ground.

"Better sit down," suggested Scipio.

The Virginian sat, and took up a paper. Thus for a little while they both read in silence.

"Did y'u stop at the Agency as y'u came along?" asked Scipio, not looking up from his paper.

"No."

There was silence again as they continued reading. The Virginian, just come from Sunk Creek, had seen no newspapers as recent as these. When two friends on meeting after absence can sit together for half an hour without a word passing between them, it is proof that they really enjoy each other's company. The gentle air came in the window, bringing the tonic odor of the sage-brush. Outside the window stretched a yellow world to distant golden hills. The talkative voice of a magpie somewhere near at hand was the only sound.

"Nothing in the newspapers in particular," said Scipio, finally.

"You expaictin' something particular?" the Virginian asked.

"Yes."

"Mind sayin' what it is?"

"Wish I knew what it is."

"Always Horacles?"

"Always him — and Uncle. I'd like to spot Uncle."

Mess call sounded from the parade ground. It recalled the flight of time to the Virginian.

"When you get back from Billings," said Scipio, "you're liable to find me up and around."

"Hope so. Maybe you'll be well enough to go with me to the ranch."

But when the Virginian returned, a great deal had happened all at once, as is the custom of events.

Scipio's vigorous convalescence brought him in the next few days to sitting about in the open air, and then enlarged his freedom to a crutch. He hobbled hither and yon, paying visits, many of them to the doctor. The doctor it was, and no newspaper, who gave to Scipio the first grain of that "something particular" which he had been daily seeking and never found. He mentioned a new building that was being put up rather far away down in the corner of the reservation. The rumor in the air was that it had something to do with the Quartermaster's department. The odd thing was that the Quarter-

master himself had heard nothing about it. The Agent up at the Agency store considered this extremely odd. But a profound absence of further explanations seemed to prevail. What possible need for a building was there at that inconvenient, isolated spot?

Scipio slapped his leg. "I guess what y'u call my romance is about to start."

"Well," the doctor admitted, "it may be. Curious things are done upon Indian reservations. Our management of them may be likened to putting the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments into a bag and crushing them to powder. Let our statesmen at Washington get their hands on an Indian reservation, and not even honor among thieves remains."

"Say, doc," said Scipio, "when d' y'u guess I can get off?"

"Don't be in too much of a hurry," the doctor cautioned him. "If you go to Sunk Creek —"

"Sunk Creek! I only want to go to the Agency."

"Oh, well, you could do that to-day — but don't you want to see the entertainment? Conjuring tricks are promised."

"I want to see Horacles."

"But he is the entertainment. Supper comes after he's through."

Scipio stayed. He was not repaid, he thought. "A poor show," was his comment as he went to bed. He came later to be very glad indeed that he had gone to that entertainment.

The next day found him seated in the Agency store, being warmly greeted by his friends the Indians. They knew him well; perhaps he understood them better than he had said. By Horacles he was not warmly greeted; perhaps Horacles did not wish to be understood — and then, Scipio, in his comings and goings through the reservation, had played with Horacles for the benefit of bystanders. There is no doubt whatever that Horacles did not understand Scipio. He was sorry to notice how the Agent, his employer, shook Scipio's hand and invited him to come and stop with him till he was fit to return to his work. And Scipio accepted this invitation. He sat him down in the store, and made himself at home. Legs stretched out on one chair, crutch within reach, hands comfortably clasped round the arms of the chair he sat in, head tilted back, eyes apparently studying

the goods which hung from the beams overhead, he visibly sniffed the air.

"Smell anything you don't like?" inquired the clerk, tartly — and unwisely.

"Nothin' except you, Horacles," was the perfectly amiable rejoinder.—"It's good," Scipio then confessed, "to be smellin' buckskin and leather and groceries instead of ether and iodoform."

"Guess you were pretty sick," observed the clerk, with relish.

"Yes. Oh, yes. I was pretty sick. That's right. Yes." Scipio had continued through these slowly drawled remarks to look at the ceiling. Then his glance dropped to the level of Horacles, and keenly fixed that unconscious youth's plump little form, pink little face, and mean little mustache. Behind one ear stuck a pen, behind the other a pencil, as the assistant clerk was arranging some tins of Arbuckle's Arioso coffee. Then Scipio took aim and fired: "So you're going to quit your job?"

Horacles whirled round. "Who says so?"

The chance shot — if there ever is such a thing, if such shots are not always the result of visions and perceptions which lie beyond our present knowledge — this chance shot had hit.

"First I've heard of it," then said Horacles, sulkily. "Guess you're delirious still." He returned to his coffee, and life grew more interesting than ever to Scipio.

Instead of trickling back, health began to rush back into his long imprisoned body, and though he could not fully use it yet, and though if he hobbled a hundred yards he was compelled to rest it, his wiry mind knew no fatigue. How athletic his brains were was easily perceived by the Indian Agent. The convalescent would hobble over to the store after breakfast and hail the assistant clerk at once. "Morning, Horacles," he would begin; "how's Uncle?"—"Oh, when are you going to give us a new joke?" the worried Horacles would retort.—"Just as soon as you give us a new Uncle, Horacles. Or any other relation to make us feel proud we know you. What did his letter last night say?" The second or third time this had been asked still found Horacles with no better repartee than angry silence. "Didn't he send me his love?" Scipio then said; and still the hapless Horacles said nothing. "Well, y'u give him mine when you write him this afternoon."—"I ain't writing this afternoon," snapped the clerk.—"You're

not! Why, I thought you wrote each other every day!" This was so near the truth that Horacles flared out: "I'd be ashamed if I'd nothing better to do than spy on other people's mails."

Thus by dinner-time generally an audience would be gathered round Scipio where he sat with his legs on the chair, and Horacles over his ledger would be furiously muttering that "Some day they would all see."

Horacles asked for a couple of days' holiday, and got it. He wished to hunt, he said. But the Agent happened to find that he had been to the railroad about some freight. This he mentioned to Scipio. "I don't know what he's up to," he said. He had found that worrying Horacles was merely one of the things that Scipio's brains were good for; Scipio had advised him prudently about a sale of beeves, and had introduced a simple contrivance for luring to the store the customers whom Horacles failed to attract. It was merely a free lunch counter,—cheese and crackers every day, and deviled ham on pay-day,—but it put up the daily receipts.

And next, one evening after the mail was in, Scipio, sitting alone in the front of the store,

saw the Agent, sitting alone in the back of the store, spring suddenly from his chair, crush a newspaper into his pocket, and stride out to his house. At breakfast the Agent spoke thus to Scipio: —

"I must go to Washington. I shall be back before they let you and your leg run loose. Will you do something for me?"

"Name it. Just name it."

"Run the store while I'm gone."

"D' y'u think I can?"

"I know you can. There'll be no trouble under you. You understand Indians."

"But suppose something turns up?"

"I don't think anything will before I'm back. I'd sooner leave you than Horacles in charge here. Will you do it and take two dollars a day?"

"Do it for nothing. Horacles'll be compensation enough."

"No, he won't. — And see here, he can't help being himself."

"Enough said. I'll strive to pity him. None of us was consulted about being born. And I'll keep remembering that we was both raised at Gallipol*eece*, Ohio, and that he inherited a bigger

outrage of a name than I did. That's what comes of havin' a French ancestor. — Only, he used to steal my lunch at school." And Scipio's bleached blue eye grew cold. Later injuries one may forgive, but school ones never.

"Didn't you whale him?" asked the Agent.

"Every time," said Scipio, "till he told Uncle. Uncle was mayor of Gallipol*eece* then. So I wasn't ready to get expelled, — I got ready later; nothin' is easier than gettin' expelled, — but I locked up my lunch after that."

"Uncle's pretty good to him," muttered the Agent. "Got him this position. — Well, nobody will expel you here. Look after things. I'll feel easy to think you're on hand."

For that newspaper which the Agent had crushed into his pocket, Scipio searched cracks and corners, but searched in vain. A fear quite unreasoning possessed him for a while: could he but learn what was in the paper that had so stirred his patron, perhaps he could avert whatever the thing was that he felt in the air, threatening some sort of injury. He knew himself resourceful. Dislike of Horacles and Uncle had been enough to start his wish to thwart them — if there was anything to thwart; but now pride and gratitude

fired him; he had been trusted; he cared more to be trusted than for anything on earth; he must rise equal to it now! The Agent had evidently taken the paper away with him — and so Scipio absurdly read all the papers. He collected old ones, and laid his hands upon the new the moment they were out of the mail-bag. It may be said that he lived daily in a wrapping of newspapers.

"Why, you have got Horacles laughing at you."

This the observant Virginian pointed out to Scipio immediately on his arrival from Billings. Scipio turned a sickened look upon his friend. The look was accompanied by a cold wave in his stomach.

"Y'u cert'nly have," the remorseless friend pursued. "I reckon he must have had a plumb happy time watchin' y'u still-hunt them newspapers. Now who'd ever have foretold you would afford Horacles enjoyment?"

In a weak voice Scipio essayed to fight it off. "Don't you try to hoodwink me with any of your frog lies."

"No need," said the Virginian. "From the door as I came in I saw him at his desk lookin' at y'u easy-like. 'Twas a right quaint pictyeh —

him smilin' at the desk, and your nose tight agaynst the Omaha *Bee*. I thought first y'u didn't have a handkerchief."

"I wonder if he has me beat?" muttered poor Scipio.

The Virginian now had a word of consolation. "Don't y'u see," he again pointed out, "that no newspaper could have helped you? If it could why did he go away to Washington without tellin' you? He don't look for you to deal with troubles he don't mention to you."

"I wonder if Horacles has me beat?" said Scipio once more.

The Virginian standing by the seated, brooding man clapped him twice on the shoulders, gently. It was enough. They were very fast friends.

"I know," said Scipio in response. "Thank y'u. But I'd hate for him to have me beat."

It was the doctor who now furnished information that would have relieved any reasonable man from a sense of failure. The doctor was excited because his view of our faith in Indian matters was again justified by a further instance.

"Oh, yes! he said. "Just give those people at Washington time, and every step they've taken from the start will be in the mud puddle of a lie.

Uncle's in the game all right. He's been meditating how to serve his country and increase his income. There's a railroad at the big end of his notion, but the entering wedge seems only to be a new store down in the corner of this reservation. You see, it has been long settled by the sacredest compacts that two stores shall be enough here — the Post-trader's and the Agent's — but the dear Indians need a third, Uncle says. He has told the Senate and the Interior Department and the White House that a lot of them have to travel too far for supplies. So now Washington is sure the Indians need a third store. The Post-trader and the Agent are stopping at the Post to-night. They got East too late to hold up the job. If Horacles opens that new store, the Agent might just as well shut up his own."

"Ain't y'u going to look at my leg?" was all the reply that Scipio made.

The doctor laughed. It was to examine the leg that he had come, and he had forgotten all about it. "You can forget all about it, too," he told Scipio when he had finished. "Go back to Sunk Creek when you like. Go back to full work next week, say. Your wicked body is sound again. A better man would unquestionably have died."

But the cheery doctor could not cheer the unreasonable Scipio. In the morning the complacent little Horacles made known to all the world his perfected arrangements. Directly the Agent had safely turned his back and gone to Washington, his disloyal clerk had become doubly busy. He had at once perceived that this was a comfortable time for him to hurry his new rival store into readiness and be securely established behind its counter before his betrayed employer should return. In this last he might not quite succeed; the Agent had come back a day or two sooner than Horacles had calculated, but it was a trifle; after all, he had carried through the small part of his uncle's scheme which he had been sent here to do. Inside that building in the far corner of the reservation, once rumored to be connected with the Quartermaster's department, he would now sell luxuries and necessities to the Indians at a price cheaper than his employer's, and his employer's store would henceforth be empty of customers. Perhaps the sweetest moment that Horacles had known for many weeks was when he said to Scipio: —

"I'm writing Uncle about it to-day."

That this should have gone on under his nose

while he sat searching the papers was to Scipio utterly unbearable. His mind was in a turmoil, feeling about helplessly but furiously for vengeance; and the Virginian's sane question — What could he have done to stop it if he had discovered it? — comforted him not at all. They were outside the store, sitting under a tree, waiting for the returning Agent to appear. But he did not come, and the suspense added to Scipio's wretchedness.

"He put me in charge," he kept repeating.

"The driver ain't responsible when a stage is held up," reasoned the Virginian.

Scipio hardly heard him. "He put me in charge," he said. Then he worked round to Horacles again. "He ain't got strength. He ain't got beauty. He ain't got riches. He ain't got brains. He's just got sense enough for parlor conjuring tricks — not good ones, either. And yet he has me beat."

"He's got an uncle in the Senate," said the Virginian.

The disconsolate Scipio took a pull at his cigar, — he had taken one between every sentence. "Damn his false teeth."

The Virginian looked grave. "Don't be hasty.

Maybe the day will come when you and me'll need 'em to chew our tenderloin."

"We'll be old. Horacles is twenty-five."

"Twenty-five is certainly young to commence eatin' by machinery," admitted the Virginian.

"And he's proud of 'em," whined Scipio. "Proud! Opens his bone box and sticks 'em out at y'u on the end of his tongue."

"I hate an immodest man," said the Virginian.

"Why, he hadn't any better sense than to do it over to the officers' club right before the ladies and everybody the other night. The K. O.'s wife said it gave her the creeps — and she don't look sensitive."

"Well," said the Virginian, "if I weighed three hundred pounds I'd be turrable sensitive."

"She had to leave," pursued Scipio. "Had to take her little girl away from the show. Them teeth comin' out of Horacles'es mouth the way they did sent the child into hysterics. Y'u could hear her screechin' half way down the line."

The Virginian looked at his watch. "I wonder if that Agent is coming here at all to-day?"

Scipio's worried face darkened again. "What can I do? What *can* I?" he demanded. And

he rose and limped up and down where the ponies were tied in front of the store. The fickle Indians would soon be tying these ponies in front of the rival store. "I received this business in good shape," continued Scipio, "and I'll hand it back in bad."

Horacles looked out of the door. He wore his hat tilted to make him look like the dare-devil that he was not; dare-devils seldom have soft pink hands, red eyelids, and a fluffy mustache. He smiled at Scipio, and Scipio smiled at him, sweetly and dangerously.

"Would you mind keeping store while I'm off?" inquired Horacles.

"Sure not!" cried Scipio, with heartiness. "Goin' to have your grand opening this afternoon?"

"Well, I *was*," Horacles replied, enjoying himself every moment. "But Mr. Forsythe" (this was the Agent) "can't get over from the Post in time to be present this afternoon. It's very kind of him to want to be present when I start my new enterprise, and I appreciate it, boys, I can tell you. So I sent him word I wouldn't think of opening without him, and it's to be to-morrow morning."

While Horacles was speaking thus, the Indians

had gathered about to listen. It was plain that they understood that this was a white man's war; their great, grave, watching faces showed it. Young squaws, half-hooded in their shawls, looked on with bright eyes; a boy who had been sitting out on the steps playing a pipe, stopped his music, and came in; the aged Pounded Meat, wrapped in scarlet and shrunk with years to the appearance of a dried apple, watched with eyes that still had in them the primal fire of life; tall in a corner stood the silver-haired High Bear, watching too. Did they understand the white man's war lying behind the complacent smile of Horacles and the dangerous smile of the lounging Scipio? The red man is grave when war is in question; all the Indians were perfectly still.

"Wish you boys could be there to give me a good send-off," continued Horacles.

The pipe-playing Indian boy must have caught some flash of something beneath Scipio's smile, for his eye went to Scipio's pistol — but it returned to Scipio's face.

Horacles spoke on. "Fine line of fresh Eastern goods, dry goods, candies, and — hee-hee! — free lunch. Mr. Le Moyne, I want to thank you publicly for that idea."

"Y'u're welcome to it. Guess I'll hardly be over to-morrow, though. With such a competitor as you, I expect I'll have to stay with my job and hustle."

"Ah, well," simpered Horacles, "I couldn't have done it by myself. My Uncle — say, boys!" (Horacles in the elation of victory now melted to pure good-will) "do come see me to-morrow. It's all business, this, you know. There's no hard feelings?"

The pipe boy couldn't help looking at the pistol again.

"Not a feeling!" cried Scipio. And he clapped Horacles between his little round shoulders. With head on one side, he looked down along his lengthy, jocular nose at Horacles for a moment. Then his eye shone upon the company like the edge of a knife — and they laughed at him because he was laughing so contagiously at them; a soft laugh, like the fall of moccasins. Often the Indian will join, like a child, in mirth which he does not comprehend. High Bear's smile shone from his corner at young Scipio, whom he fancied so much that he had offered him his fourteenth daughter to wed as soon as his leg should be well. But Scipio had sorrow-

fully explained to the father that he was already married—which was true, but which I fear would in former days have proved no impediment to him. Perhaps some day I may tell you of the early marriages of Scipio as Scipio in hospital narrated them to me.

"Hey!" said High Bear now, to Scipio. "New store. Pretty good. Heap cheap."

"Yes, High Bear. Heap cheap. You savvy why?"

With a long arm and an outstretched finger, Scipio suddenly pointed to Horacles. At this the Virginian's hitherto unchanging face wakened to curiosity and attention. Scipio was now impressively and mysteriously nodding at the silver-haired chief in his bright, green blanket, and his long, fringed, yellow, soft buckskins.

"No savvy," said High Bear, after a pause, with a tinge of caution. He had followed Scipio's pointing finger to where Horacles was happily practising a trick with a glass and a silver dollar behind the counter.

"Heap cheap," repeated Scipio, "because" (here he leaned close to High Bear and whispered) "because his uncle medicine-man. He big medicine-man, too."

High Bear's eyes rested for a moment on Horacles. Then he shook his head. "Ah, nah," he grunted. "He not medicine-man. He fall off horse. He no catch horse. My little girl catch him. Ah, nah!" High Bear laughed profusely at "Sippo's" joke. "Sippo" was the Indians' English name for their vivacious friend. In their own language they called him something complimentary in several syllables, but it was altogether too intimate and too plain-spoken for me to repeat aloud. Into his whisper Scipio now put more electricity. "He's big medicine man," he hissed again, and he drilled his bleached blue eye into the brown one of the savage. "See him now!" He stretched out a vibrating finger.

It was a pack of cards that Horacles was lightly manipulating. He fluttered it open in the air and fluttered it shut again, drawing it out like a concertina and pushing it flat like an opera hat — nor did a card fall to the ground.

High Bear watched it hard; but soon High Bear laughed. "He pretty good," he declared. "All same tin-horn monte-man. I see one Miles City."

"Maybe monte-man medicine-man too," suggested Scipio.

"Ah, nah!" said High Bear. Yet nevertheless Scipio saw him shoot one or two more doubtful glances at Horacles as that happy clerk continued his activities.

Horacles had an audience (which he liked), and he held his audience — and who could help liking that? The bucks and squaws watched him, sometimes nudging one another, and they smiled and grunted their satisfaction at his news. Cheaper prices was something which their primitive minds could take in as well as any of us.

"Why you not sell cheap like him?" they asked their friend "Sippo." "We stay then. Not go his store." This was the burden of their chorus, soft, laughing, a little mocking, floating among them like a breeze, voice after voice: —

"We like buy everything you, we like buy everything cheap."

"You make cheap, we buy heap shirts."

"Buy heap tobacco."

"Heap cartridge."

"You not sell cheap, we go."

"Ah!"

The chorus laughed like pleased children.

Scipio looked at them solemnly. He explained

how much he would like to sell cheap, if only he were a medicine-man like Horacles.

"You medicine-man?" they asked the assistant clerk.

"Yes," said Horacles, pleased. "I big medicine-man."

"Ah, nah!" The soft, mocking words ran among them like the flight of a moth.

Soon with their hoods over their heads they began to go home on their ponies, blanketed, feathered, many-colored, moving and dispersing wide across the sage-brush to their far-scattered tepees.

High Bear lingered last. For a long while he had been standing silent and motionless. When the chorus spoke he had not; when the chorus laughed he had not. Now his head moved; he looked about him and saw that for a moment he was alone in a way. He saw the Virginian reading a newspaper, and his friend "Sippo" bending down and attending to his leg. Horacles had gone into an inner room. Left on the counter lay the pack of cards. High Bear went quickly to the cards, touched them, lifted them, set them down, and looked about him again. But the Virginian was read-

High Bear galloped away into the dusk

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ing still, and Scipio was still bent down, having some trouble with his boot. High Bear looked at the cards, shook his head sceptically, laughed a little, grunted once, and went out where his pony was tied. As he was throwing his soft buckskin leg over the saddle, there was Scipio's head thrust out of the door and nodding strangely at him.

"Good night, High Bear. He big medicine-man."

High Bear gave a quick slash to his pony, and galloped away into the dusk.

Then Scipio limped back into the store, sank into the first chair he came to, and doubled over. The Virginian looked up from his paper at this mirth, scowled, and turned back to his reading. If he was to be "left out" of the joke, he would make it plain that he was not in the least interested in it.

Scipio now sat up straight, bursting to share what was in his mind; but he instantly perceived how it was with the Virginian. At this he redoubled his silent symptoms of delight. In a moment Horacles had come back from the inner room with his hair wet with ornamental brushing.

"Well, Horacles," began Scipio in the voice of a purring cat, "I expect y'u have me beat."

The flattered clerk could only nod and show his bright, false teeth.

"Y'u have me beat," repeated Scipio. "Y'u have for a fact."

"Not you, Mr. Le Moyne. It's not you I'm making war on. I do hope there's no hard feelings—"

"Not a feelin', Horacles! How can y'u entertain such an idea?" Scipio shook him by the hand and smiled like an angel at him—a fallen angel. "What's the use of me keepin' this store open to-morrow? Nobody'll be here to spend a cent. Guess I'll shut up, Horacles, and come watch the Injuns all shoppin' like Christmas over to your place."

The Virginian sustained his indifference, and added to Scipio's pleasure. But during breakfast the Virginian broke down.

"Reckon you're ready to start to-day?" he said.

"Start? Where for?"

"Sunk Creek, y'u fool! Where else?"

"I'm beyond y'u! I'm sure beyond y'u for once!" screeched Scipio, beating his crutch on the floor.

"Oh, eat your grub, y'u fool."

"I'd have told y'u last night," said Scipio, remorselessly, "only y'u were so awful anxious not to *be* told."

As the Virginian drove him across the sage-brush, not to Sunk Creek, but to the new store, the suspense was once more too much for the Southerner's curiosity. He pulled up the horses as the inspiration struck him.

"You're going to tell the Indians you'll under-sell him!" he declared, over-hastily.

"Oh, drive on, y'u fool," said Scipio.

The baffled Virginian grinned. "I'll throw you out," he said, "and break all your laigs and bones and things fresh."

"I wish Uncle was going to be there," said Scipio.

Nearly everybody else was there: the Agent, bearing his ill fortune like a philosopher; some officers from the Post, and the doctor; some enlisted men, blue-legged with yellow stripes; civilians male and female, honorable and shady; and then the Indians. Wagons were drawn up, ponies stood about, the littered plain was populous. Horacles moved behind the counter, busy and happy; his little mustache was combed, his

ornamental hair was damp. He smiled and talked, and handled and displayed his abundance: the bright calicoes, the shining knives, the clean six-shooters and rifles, the bridles, the fishing-tackle, the gum-drops and chocolates — all his plenty and its cheapness.

Squaws and bucks young and old thronged his establishment, their soft footfalls and voices made a gentle continuous sound, while their green and yellow blankets bent and stood straight as they inspected and purchased. High Bear held an earthen crock with a luxury in it — a dozen of fresh eggs. "Hey!" he said when he saw his friend "Sippo" enter. "Heap cheap." And he showed the eggs to Scipio. He cherished the crock with one hand and arm while with the other hand he helped himself to the free lunch.

To Scipio Horacles "extended" a special welcome; he made it ostentatious in order that all the world might know how perfectly absent "hard feelings" were. And Scipio on his side wore openly the radiance of brotherhood and well-wishing. He went about admiring everything, exclaiming now and then over the excellence of the goods, or the cheapness of their price. His presence was soon no longer a cause of curiosity, and

they forgot to watch him — all of them except the Virginian. The hours passed on, the little fires, where various noon meals were cooked, burnt out, satisfied individuals began to depart after an entertaining day, the Agent himself was sauntering toward his horse.

"What's your hurry?" said Scipio.

"Well, the show is over," said the Agent.

"Oh, no, it ain't. Horacles is goin' to entertain us a whole lot."

"Better stay," said the Virginian.

The Agent looked from one to the other. Then he spoke anxiously. "I don't want anything done to Horacles."

"Nothing will be done," stated Scipio.

The Agent stayed. The magnetic current of expectancy passed, none could say how, through the assembled people. No one departed after this, and the mere loitering of spectators turned to waiting. Particularly expectant was the Virginian, and this he betrayed by mechanically droning in his strongest accent a little song that bore no reference to the present occasion:—

"Of all my fatheh's familee
I love myself the baist,
And if Gawd will just look afteh me
The devil may take the raist."

The sun grew lower. The world outside was still full of light, but dimness had begun its subtle pervasion of the store. Horacles thanked the Indians and every one for their generous patronage on this his opening day, and intimated that it was time to close. Scipio rushed up and whispered to him: —

"My goodness, Horacles! You ain't going to send your friends home like that?"

Horacles was taken aback. "Why," he stammered, "what's wrong?"

"Where's your vanishing handkerchief, Horacles? Get it out and entertain 'em some. Show you're grateful. Where's that trick dollar? Get 'em quick. — I tell you," he declaimed aloud to the Indians, "he big medicine-man. Make come. Make go. You no see. Nobody see. Make jack-rabbit in hat — "

"I couldn't to-night," simpered Horacles. "Needs preparation, you know." And he winked at Scipio.

Scipio struggled upon the counter, and stood up above their heads to finish his speech. "No jack-rabbit this time," he said.

"Ah, nah!" laughed the Indians. "No catch um."

"Yes, catch um any time. Catch anything. Make anything. Make all this store" — Scipio moved his arms about — "that's how make heap cheap. See that!" He stopped dramatically, and clasped his hands together. Horacles tossed a handkerchief in the air, caught it, shut his hand upon it with a kneading motion, and opened the hand empty. "His fingers swallow it, all same mouth!" shouted Scipio. "He big medicine-man. You see. Now other hand spit out." But Horacles varied the trick. Success and the staring crowd elated him; he was going to do his best. He opened both hands empty, felt about him in the air, clutched space suddenly, and drew two silver dollars from it. Then he threw them back into space, again felt about for them in the air, made a dive at High Bear's eggs, and brought handkerchief and dollars out of them.

"Ho!" went High Bear, catching his breath. He backed away from the reach of Horacles. He peered down into the crock among his eggs. Horacles whispered to Scipio: —

"Keep talking till I'm ready."

"Oh, I'll talk. Go get ready quick, — High Bear, what I tell you?" But High Bear's eye was now fixedly watching the door through

which Horacles had withdrawn; he did not listen as Scipio proceeded. "What I tell everybody? He do handkerchief. He do dollar. He do heap more. See me. I no can do like him. I not medicine-man. I throw handkerchief and dollar in the air, look! See! they tumble on floor no good, — thank you, my kind noble friend from Virginia, you pick my fool dollar and my fool handkerchief up for me, *muy pronto.* Oh, thank you, black-haired, green-eyed son of Dixie, you have the manners of a queen, but I no medicine-man, I shall never turn a skunk into a watermelon, I innocent, I young, I helpless babe, I suck bottle when I can get it. Fire and water will not obey me. Old man Makes-the-Thunder does not know my name and address. He spit on me Wednesday night last, and there are no dollars in this man's hair." (The Virginian winced beneath Scipio's vicious snatch at his scalp, and the Agent and the doctor retired to a dark corner and laid their heads in each other's waistcoats.) "Ha! he comes! Big medicine-man comes. See him, High Bear! His father, his mother, his aunts all twins, he ninth dog-pup in three sets of triplets, and the great white Ram-of-the-Mountains fed him on punkin-seed. — Sick 'em, Horacles."

The burning eye of High Bear now blazed with distended fascination, riveted upon Horacles, whom it never left. Darkness was gathering in the store.

"Hand all same foot," shouted Scipio, with gestures, "mouth all same hand. Can eat fire. Can throw ear mile off and listen you talk." Here Horacles removed a dollar from the hair of High Bear's fourteenth daughter, threw it into one boot, and brought it out of the other. The daughter screamed and burrowed behind her sire. All the Indians had drawn close together, away from the counter, while Scipio on top of the counter talked high and low, and made gestures without ceasing. "Hand all same mouth. Foot all same head. Take off head, throw it out window, it jump in door. See him, see big medicine-man!" And Scipio gave a great shriek.

A gasp went among the Indians; red fire was blowing from the jaws of Horacles. It ceased, and after it came slowly, horribly, a long red tongue, and riding on the tongue's end glittered a row of teeth. There was a crash upon the floor. It was High Bear's crock. The old chief was gone. Out of the door he flew, his blanket over his face, and up on his horse he sprang,

wildly beating the animal. Squaws and bucks flapped after him like poultry, rushing over the ground, leaping on their ponies, melting away into the dusk. In a moment no sign of them was left but the broken eggs, oozing about on the deserted floor.

The white men there stood tearful, dazed, and weak with laughter.

"'Happy-Teeth' should be his name," said the Virginian. "It sounds Injun." And Happy-Teeth it was. But Horacles did not remain long in the neighborhood after he realized what he had done; for never again did an Indian enter, or even come near, that den of flames and magic. They would not even ride past it; they circled it widely. The idle merchandise that filled it was at last bought by the Agent at a reduction.

"Well," said Scipio bashfully to the Agent, "I'd have sure hated to hand y'u back a ruined business. But he'll never understand Injuns."

Out of the door he flew, — squaws and bucks flapped after him like poultry

II

SPIT-CAT CREEK

THE cabin on Spit-Cat Creek lies lonely among the high pastures, and looks down to further loneliness across many slanting levels of pine-tops. These descend successively in smooth, odorous, evergreen miles until they reach the open valley. Here runs the stage road, if you can discern it, from the railway to the continuously jubilant cow-town of Likely, Wyoming; and here, when viewed from the cabin through a field-glass, you can readily distinguish an antelope from a stone in the clear atmosphere which commonly prevails. The windows of the cabin are three, and looking in through any of them you can see the stove, the table, and the ingenuous structure which does duty as a bed. During the season of snow, from November until May, the cabin (in the days of which I speak) was dwelt in by no one; while through the open weather some person of honesty and resource would be sent thither from the headquarters ranch on Sunk Creek two or three times, to stay no longer than

his duties required, and to come back with his report as soon as they should be performed. Such a man would live here with canned food and the small stove, seldom having other company than his own, and, if he had ears for the music of nature, the singing pines would often companion him, he could hear now and again some unseen bird crying as it passed among them, and always the voice of Spit-Cat. This stream foamed by the cabin to fall and wander deviously away into the great, distant silence of the mountains. Likely was eighteen miles distant, and to this place the man could ride in four hours by a recently discovered trail, which was the shorter one, and followed the smaller tributary stream of Spit-Kitten; and sometimes the man did so ride for his mail, or for more canned food, or for a game of chance and female company, in the continuously jubilant cow-town of Likely, Wyoming.

Upon a midday in June, had you secretly peered through any of the windows in the cabin, you could have seen a seated man, tightly curved over the table and apparently dying in convulsions brought on by poison; for the signs of a newly finished meal were near him. There was

a coffee-pot, and a dish of bacon, and three quarters of a pie. But it was merely Scipio Le Moyne endeavoring to write a letter; and no task more excruciating was known to this young man.

"Dear friend," he had begun, "i got no dictionery, but —"

At this point a heavy blot had intervened as he was changing the personal pronoun into a capital I.

"Oh, gosh!" he sighed, and for a while could spell no more. He sat back, staring at the paper. "It's not to a girl," he presently muttered. "I guess I'll not start a fresh sheet." And while the perspiring Scipio laid his nose to his pen and dragged himself onward from word to word, a bad old gentleman with a black coat and a white beard was coming stealthily up from the valley through the thick pines. He was still some miles away, and he meant to look in at one of the windows, and regulate his conduct according to what he should then see. He was by no means sure that Scipio had what he wanted, which was as much money as he could get, or any fraction thereof; but he had a shrewd suspicion that he could ascertain this without any extreme use of deadly weapons.

Scipio Le Moyne was making his first stay in the Spit-Cat cabin, and in his mind there welled a complacency not to be justified; for when a thick roll of money is in a man's trousers, and the man's trousers are upon the man, and the man is writing a letter at a table, you see at once how unsafe the money is if the man's six-shooter is lying out of reach on the bed behind him. It should be hanging at his hip, or in the armhole of his waistcoat, or stuck elsewhere handily about his immediate person. And so it would have been on any ordinary day of Scipio's life; but alas! on this day he was writing a letter, and was therefore not quite accountable. There were many things that he did not enjoy — cooking, for example, or a bucking pony, or gun trouble in a saloon; but these worries he could usually meet. The only crisis which invariably disturbed him (except, of course, having to talk to Eastern ladies when they visited the Judge's ranch) was to be face to face with ink and a pen. After his midday meal this noon he had reclined upon his bed, putting off the hateful moment. Thus recumbent he had unbuckled his belt for comfort and got none, for the letter made him restless. At length, with a mind absent from everything

save the coming ink and pen, he had gone to them, forgetting his revolver among the rumpled blankets.

Complacency welled in his mind because of errands accomplished. He had been trusted, and he had a pride in it deeper than any words he was willing to utter, and a gratitude which he would express by inference alone. He would do everything that they had given him to do so well that it could not be done better; that is how he would thank his friend, the Sunk Creek foreman, for giving him this chance to show his abilities — and his radical honesty. (Scipio was not in the least honest on the surface.) He would take no man's word for an inch of the work that he had been sent to oversee on both sides of the mountain; he would visit the various camps when he was not expected; every cow to be bought should be bought on his own inspection and not on the seller's assurances. But these trusts were little compared with the heavy wages that he was carrying to pay off certain men when certain work should be finished. He had hoped to be rid of this at once, but late snows and high water had delayed the work.

Scipio Le Moyne was among the newcomers

at the headquarters ranch on Sunk Creek. His character had not yet been tested by a year's scrutiny. He was known to ride and rope well, and to cook indifferently, and to return from town having behaved himself less ill than the worst; but Judge Henry had drawn back from putting in his hands a temptation so potent as the wages. Much ready money is a burning argument for a disappearance. To these cautious sentiments of the Judge his foreman had replied scarcely more than "I have studied Scipio mighty thorough." To Scipio himself, the friend for whose character he was thus pledging his good judgment, he merely remarked, "Stay with the money."

"Stay with it!" exclaimed Scipio, nearly overcome by his feelings. He wanted to hug the foreman; and lest his eyes should betray something, he narrowed them to a wicked slit, and put on the disguise of jocularity. "If y'u say so, I'll stay with it till I come home with it."

The usually sharp-witted foreman was at a loss.

"Sure!" Scipio explained. "I'll pay the boys what they're owed, and take 'em into Likely and win it back off 'em. Why, it's the kind of plan y'u might think of yourself."

"You're cert'nly shameless," murmured the foreman.

"So my enemies all say," retorted Scipio. Thus had he departed to Sunk Creek.

And now, having done well most things he was sent to do, his heart was so grateful to his friend that he would conquer his distaste for the pen, and write a long letter without a single word of thanks in it — the thanks would merely be between every line. The truly heavy load of responsibility was still with him, but safe with him; that money would go into the hands of the men at the Flat Iron outfit to-morrow, and surprise them. Had he not been adroit? No one suspected he was the paymaster. Visiting Likely once for his mail and some supplies, he had been obliged to spend the night there. His prudence as to whiskey and general abstemiousness of conduct that night might point, he feared, to the fact that he carried money he was "staying with." He even felt a certain observation to attend his movements. He therefore began to speak deceitfully to the company he sat among. Had anybody else, he inquired, been through here from Sunk Creek? Nobody else had, it appeared; and Scipio smoked for a while.

"Well," he remarked at length, with a certain gloom, like one who speaks from an offended heart, "a man don't enjoy bein' mistrusted. Not if there's never been nothing to justify it." He said no more, waiting for some one to draw the desired inference from this utterance.

After a matter of some five minutes the inference was appreciated, and he received a counter-offer, so to speak, a trifle too obviously aimed. "Them hands at the Flat Iron," said the offerer, "has most finished their job, ain't they?"

"I don't know about them," said Scipio, keeping in the land of inference. "I've finished mine, I know." Then, after a proper pause and with proper bitterness, he finished: "If folks can't trust me they can't hire me."

It was lightly handled, and it did its work in Likely. All Likely gossiped next day about how Judge Henry would not let Scipio handle the Flat Iron money, and how Scipio let his feelings be shown too plain for self-respect—all Likely, save one close observer. The old gentleman with the black coat and the white beard thought that it was odd in Scipio to behave so carefully during his night in town, odd and interesting to drink nothing and go to bed early in the hotel. "That

kind don't," he said to himself; "not usually when they're mad at their employer and goin' to quit their job." The old gentleman did not gossip, but grew thoughtful. One morning he got on his old pink mare, and took a quiet trail for Spit-Cat. He thought he knew the way, but lost himself, and luckily met a man on the stage road who directed him up the old, established trail. Or rather, it was lucky that he lost himself, else he would have arrived before Scipio had unbuckled his pistol and forgotten everything in the world but this letter he was knee-deep in.

"*Dear friend* I got no dictionery but if any of my spelling raises your suspicions you can borrow a dictionery at your end and theirby correct my statements which are otherwise garranteed to be strictly accurite. Hope you are well I am same. Have a good notion not to sine this for you will know my tracks without more information. Well buisniss first and I will try run in a little pleasure for you if my nerve holds out but that blot will tell you I am not myself just now. You said I was shameless but you are dead wrong about me. To think of the way you lied to those poor boys about the frogs has made me blush in bed after many a day when my own concience was at piece.

I have looked after the new ditches I had to attend to them a whole lot they are all right now but they were not the young yellowleg who calls himself a civil engineer I guess becaus he looks at a grade through a machine on three sticks instead of with his naked eye was making trouble. He was arranging for the water from Crow Canyon to run up hill. We got it started the right way yesterday but that civil engineer does too much fingering with his pencil to suit me he has a whole box full of sums in arrithmetic. The fences are satisfactory. I was oblidged to turn half the cattle back the man thought I was one of those who do not know a cow when they see one but he has gone home realizing his poor judgment. And now that is all except I am paying off the extra hands at the Flat Iron outfit to-morrow or next day sure and now for pleasure as my hand has got limbered up wonderful and no longer oblidged to blast out every word with giant powder like I had to all around the start where you see those blots. I guess the words are going to get to chasing each other off this pen before I am through telling you something.

"I have noticed a thing. Be the first to tell a joke on yourself it deadens the blow. Well

Honey Wiggin has found out about this so I am going to hurry up and get ahead of his news. Likely is the town here as you know and twenty hours is still the record for driving to it from the railroad but there is a new trail from here to Likely by Spit-Kitten it saves an hour so I am living an hour nearer the fashion than you told me I would be when you gave me this job. But it was by no means to be fashionable that I had to go over to Likely though it is a good place for a man who wants to and this cabin is not fashionable a little bit but my flour gave out. The last of it was eat up by Honey Wiggin who stopped here one night and told me about the trail by Spit-Kitten witch he claimed was easy except in one place by what they call the Little Pasture. You come on the fence on the side hill up among the trees where they have been cut down some and Honey said follow the fence a good ways maybe three miles he thought but not more and you would see the place where the trail took off down the hill through the same kind of trees pretty thin growing and pines mostly till you would come to the edge and see the town down below about half an hour more riding. Honey went over the mountain to Flat Iron and I caught

up my horse and started for Likely. The trail was all right unless for a horse packed heavy and I did not hurry any for I knew I had the night to put in in town and I was in no haste to get there because I could have no enjoyment when I did on account of the money. I was invited a lot when I got there but though I have been going to bed the same day I got up for many weeks I was taking no risk. But that is not my point it is the Little Pasture I want to speak of. It got shady while I was following the fence which I struck all right but I did not mind and I was studying up something to tell any folks that might inquire about the money for Flat Iron for I have to practiss lying I am not quick at it like you. Well sir I went along getting up some remarks and then picking out them I considered to be the most promissing but after a while I says to myself it must be most three miles I have come along this fence. But Honey Wiggin is not special close about distances, and so I went along rejecting some of the remarks I had picked out and putting stronger ones in their place and pretty soon I knew I must have come five miles anyway for Japan can walk three miles an hour and I had looked at my watch. I made Japan lope and then

I made him gallup and then something struck me like a flash and I got off him and I tied my hankerchef to the fence and me and Japan gallupped like we was both crazy and it was not twenty minnits till we came round to my hankerchef again. I expect the pasture is three miles round but cannot say how many times I circled her. I struck out for myself then and come to another fence and that was the one Honey meant, only he says now he told me to look out and not take the first fence.

"In Likely I went to bed the same day I got up and I slept in my pants with the money and can say I will be glad when —"

Here Scipio Le Moyne looked up from his letter, for the old gentleman stood in the door and wished him good morning. It was not morning, but let that go. The old gentleman had taken his observations through the window behind Scipio and had been much pleased to notice the six-shooter among the blankets. He had observed everything: the pie, the letter, all things inside the cabin, and also that outside the cabin Scipio's horse was grazing in the little field, and therefore not instantly serviceable. His own animal he had tied to a tree a little distance within the timber.

"Good morning," he said.

Scipio's entire inward arrangements gave a monstrous leap, but his outward start was very slight. "Hello, Uncle Pasco!" said he cheerfully. "Are y'u lost?" And he sat in his chair quite still.

Uncle Pasco stood blinking in his usual way. "No," he returned. "Not lost. Just off trappin'. That's what." His voice was an old man's, dry and chirping, and his sentences proceeded in short hops. He had seen Scipio's one-quarter inch of movement, and he read that movement with admirable insight: it had been a quickly arrested and choked impulse to get to those blankets. And Scipio had done some reading, too. He saw Uncle Pasco's eye measuring distances, and he could discern no sign whatever of pistol upon the old gentleman. This rendered him extremely cautious, and his thoughts worked at a remarkable speed. Uncle Pasco did not have to think so quickly, for he had begun his meditations in Likely several days ago, and they were all finished as far as they could be up to the present juncture. Even the most ripened strategist must leave some moves to be determined by the fluctuations of the battle.

"Been off trappin'," repeated Uncle Pasco.

"What luck?" Scipio inquired.

"Poor. Poor. Beaver gettin' cleaned out of this country. That's what."

"Better sit down and eat," said Scipio. "Take your coat off and stay a while."

Uncle Pasco's glance rested on the pie a moment, and then upon Scipio's ink-covered sheets. "M—well," he said doubtfully, for Scipio's ease had now put him in doubt, "I got to get back to Likely. Pie looks good. Pie like mother made. That's what. M—well, you're busy. Guess you want to write your letter."

Scipio now looked at his letter, and drew inspiration from it, a forlorn hope of inspiration. "Why, you don't need to start for Likely so soon," he remarked with a persuasive whine. "What was the use in stoppin' at all? Eat the balance of the pie and take the new trail—if your packs are not loaded heavy."

"Spit-Kitten?" said Uncle Pasco.

"Yep," said Scipio. "Saves an hour."

"Ain't been over it," said Uncle Pasco.

"Can't miss it," said Scipio. "Your pack's light?"

"M—well," answered Uncle Pasco, doubtfully, "fairly light."

"Sit down," said Scipio. "I'll tell y'u about the trail while you're eatin' the pie." He made as if to rise and offer the only chair in the room to Uncle Pasco. This brought Uncle Pasco immediately to his side.

"Keep a-sittin'," the old gentleman urged. "Keep a-sittin', and draw me a map. That's what. Map of Spit-Kitten."

"Here," began Scipio, wriggling his pen across a blank sheet, "runs Spit-Cat. This here cross is this cabin. Stream's runnin' this way. Understand?"

"That's plain," said Uncle Pasco.

"Here," and Scipio wriggled his pen at right angles to the first wriggle, "comes Spit-Kitten into the main creek—right above this cabin. See? Well. Now." Scipio began dotting lines. "You follow the little creek up, *so*. Then you cross over to the left bank, *so*. And you go right up out of a little canyon (you can't if your packs is heavy loaded, for it's awful steep and slippery for pretty near a hundred yards) and you come out on top clear going—gosh! I've got to take another sheet of paper—well, now y'u go down easy

a mile or two and keep swinging to your right, and about here" — Scipio now sprinkled some points on the paper — "the trees begin gettin' scattery and you look out for a fence on your left. You follow that fence for — well, I'd not say whether it's three miles or four — it's that noo pasture the Seventy-six outfit calls their Little Pasture, and before y'u come to the corner where there's a gate by a gushin' creek I don't know the name of, you'll notice the hill goin' down to your right all over good grass and mighty few trees, and if it's dark you'll see the lights of the town below and the trail takes off right about where you'll be standing this way" (Scipio scratched an arrow), "and don't y'u mind if it looks like a little-worn trail, for that's the way it is, and y'u can't miss it on that hillside. See?"

"That's plain as day," said Uncle Pasco, accepting the two sheets of the map and sliding them into his own pocket. He still stood beside Scipio, irresolutely, considering the lumpy appearance of Scipio's pocket. A handkerchief with a bag of tobacco might produce such a bulge.

"Fine day," said Scipio. "Better stay a while."

"Good weather right along now," said Uncle Pasco.

"Time it was," said Scipio, "after the wettin' the month of May gave us. Boys doin' anything in town lately?"

"Oh, gay, gay," returned Uncle Pasco. And he ran a pistol against Scipio's head. "Out with it," he commanded. "Cough up."

It is possible, under these circumstances, to refuse to cough, and to perform instead some rapid athletics which result in a bullet-hole in the wall or ceiling, to be forever after pointed to. But the odds are so heavy that the hole will be in neither the wall nor the ceiling that many people of undoubted valor have found coughing more discreet. Scipio coughed.

"Uncle Pasco," said he gracefully, "I didn't know you were that artistic."

Uncle Pasco now marched to the bed, and appropriated Scipio's pistol. "Just for the present," he explained.

"Uncle Pasco," resumed Scipio, mild as a dove, and never stirring from his chair, "you have learned me something to-day. It's expensive education. I'll not say it ain't. But I'm goin' to tell y'u where I went wrong. I'd ought to have

acted more careless in Likely that night. I'd ought to have taken a whirl somewheres. Bein' so quiet exposed my hand to y'u. But, see here, I had everybody fooled but you."

"You're a kid," responded Uncle Pasco, but with indulgence. "You be good. Keep a-sittin' right there. Pie like mother made." And with the pie in one hand and his pistol in the other he made a comfortable lunch.

"It *was* my over-carefulness, warn't it?" persisted Scipio. "I have sure paid y'u good to know!"

"You're a kid," Uncle Pasco, with unchanged indulgence, repeated. "You'll do in time. Keep studying seasoned men. That's what." And he finished his meal. "You'll find your six-shooter in the place where I'll put it."

The old gentleman opened the door, and, leaving Scipio in the chair, walked briskly by the corral into the trees and mounted his old pink mare. From the door of the cabin Scipio watched him amble away along the banks of Spit-Cat.

"Pie like mother made!" he muttered. "You patch-sewed bread-basket! Why, you fringy-panted walking delegate, I'll agitate your system

till your back teeth are chewin' your own sweetbreads!" He seized up a rope and began walking to where his horse was pasturing. "I could forgive him takin' the money," he continued. "He outplayed me. But—" Scipio was silent for a few yards, and then, "Pie like mother made!" he burst out again.

And now, reader, please rise with me in the air and look down like a bird at the trail of Spit-Kitten. The afternoon has grown late, and shadow is ascending among the thin pines by the Little Pasture. There goes Uncle Pasco, ambling easily along. He counts his money, and slaps his bad old leg with joy. With all those dollars he can render the next several months more than comfortable. Now he consults Scipio's map, and here, sure enough, he comes to the fence, just as Scipio said he would come; that fence he was to follow for three miles, perhaps, or four. Uncle Pasco slaps his leg again, and gives a horrid, unconscientious cackle. And now he hangs Scipio's pistol on a post of the fence and proceeds. While pleasing thoughts of San Francisco and champagne fill his mind as he rides, there comes Scipio along the trail after him at a nicely set interval. All is working with the agree-

able precision of a clock. Scipio recovers his pistol, and after tying his horse out of sight a little way down the hill, he runs back and sits snug behind a tree close to the fence, waiting. He looks at his watch. "It took Japan and me twenty minutes to go around at a gallop," he observes. "Uncle Pasco ain't goin' half that fast." Scipio continues to wait with his six-shooter ready. In due time he pricks up his ears and rises upon his feet behind the tree. Next, he steps forth with his smile of an angel — but a fallen angel.

"Pie like mother made," he remarks musically.

Why tell of Uncle Pasco's cruel surprise? It is not known if he had gone round the fence more than once; but the town of Likely saw the dreadful condition of his clothes as he rode in that night. It was almost no clothes.

At that hour Scipio was finishing his letter to the foreman: —

"— this risponsibillity is shed," had been the unwritten fragment of his sentence when it was cut short, and he now completed it, and went on: —

"Quite a little thing has took place just now about that money. Don't jump for I am staying with it as you said to and I am liable to be stay-

ing with it as long as necessary but an old hobo held me up and got it off me and kept it for most three hours when I got it back off the old fool. I would not have throwed him around like I did if he had been content to lift the cash but he had to insult me too said I was pie and next time he'll know a man should be civil no matter what his employment is.

"I have noticed another thing. To shoot strait always go to bed the same day you get up and to think strait use same pollicy.

"Your friend,

"SCIPIO LE MOYNE.

"P.S. I am awful oblidged to you."

III

IN THE BACK

FORCE, as you may know, is like the King, and never dies. It endlessly transmits itself through the same or some other shape. Drop a stone in a pond, and the wave-rings may seem to expire as they widen, but they do not; through friction or impact or something, they merely become invisible. You can stop a cannon-ball, but you cannot kill its speed; its speed is immortal and undergoes instant resurrection, taking the new shape of heat. The cannon-ball becomes red hot and sends heat waves off into infinity. Scientific men have told you all this as they have told me, and judging from the delightful events which I shall proceed to narrate, I should not wonder if the scientific men were right.

I. THE STORING OF THE ENERGY

ONCE upon a time the army had a wet-nurse instead of a secretary of war. The nurse fed our soldiers upon speeches, milk-and-sugar speeches, all over the country. He told them he was going

to right their wrongs. Now, as they didn't know that they had any wrongs, this both surprised and pleased them. They liked to hear him inform them that it was they who from the first had won our battles upon land and sea. "Who" (he would ask rhetorically), "who endured the bitter cold, the frozen snow, at Valley Forge?" And as they hadn't the slightest idea, what more agreeable than to learn it was themselves? "Let us honor George Washington" (he would exclaim), "let us not forget that great and good man! but let us remember also the honest soldier without whose aid George Washington could never have durriven the Burritish tyrant from our beloved shores of furreedom!"

He always spoke of the "honest" soldier, and therefore the average enlisted man very naturally felt that somehow George Washington, Andrew Jackson and Ulysses Grant were all well enough in their way, but that you must keep your eye on them, and that the Secretary was the man to put them in their proper place. The Secretary quite rightly omitted to state that generals are apt to carry a responsibility which would iron the average enlisted man flatter than a pair of pressed trousers; he omitted this statement because it

would have been the whole truth, and the whole truth is often very tiresome, particularly for a politician. Do not, as you read this, think evil of the Secretary; he had a large family of daughters and sons with whom he was frequently photographed, seated on the vine-clad porch of the old white homestead, and these photographs were at once widely given to the public press. Moreover, his private life was known to be chaste by every lady in the land, though how they ascertained this I am at a loss to explain. He was also a highly gifted man; gifted with the voice that matches a political frock-coat. At will he could make this so impressive, that if he remarked it was a fine day, for the time of year, it convinced the audience that something of the utmost importance had been announced. He was gifted, too, with a face impervious to vulgar scrutiny, and he had the most deeply religious chinbeard in Apple-Jack county. I have already mentioned that he possessed the gift of tears, when such phenomenon was timely, and besides all these things, he owned some extensive salt-marshes on a bay. These were too wet for private persons to buy, but he was going to be happy to sell them to the government for a naval station when he should be Sena-

tor, after his present office had expired. Meanwhile he went about busily with his basket, collecting popularity from the humblest dumping lot.

If there was one kind of audience that the Secretary liked above all others, it was an audience of fresh, bright, brave, young recruits. He missed no chance to tell them so. Their earnest faces, he was apt to say if there was a flag anywhere in sight, stirred his heart more, much more than the stars upon Old Glory waving yonder. Then he would point to Old Glory, and get results from the gallery as satisfactory as any actor could wish. Indeed, the Secretary could have made the drama as lucrative as he made politics. He could tell a story and make you laugh, tell another and make you cry, and a really excellent second-rate actor was lost in him. In the good old days of which I write, many of our political patriots resembled the Secretary.

Recruits after his own heart sat close before him one afternoon at McPherson, gathered from various Southern States.

"Let those young men come up front!" he had commanded from the platform in his deepest frock-coat basso. "Let them see me and let me see

them. We understand each other, for we are comrades."

Accordingly, the recruits occupied the front benches, while the mustache of Captain Stone, who sat in the rear of the hall, began to look like the back of a dog's neck when the dog is not pleased. The captain took down one leg that had been crossed over the other, and began sliding one hand up and down the yellow stripe of his trousers. To his brother officers and to his favorite sergeant, Jones, this hand sliding was another sign, like the singular behavior of the mustache. Nobody knew whether it was the hair itself that rose, or whether he did it with his upper lip; but when the whole thing stood straight out beyond his nose, everybody knew at a hundred yards' range what it meant, no matter how it was done. It was the hurricane signal and you steered your course accordingly.

"You never'll get a better captain, Jock," Sergeant Jones would often remark to Corporal Cumnor. "But you want to catch his profile at morning stables. If the muss-tash is merely standing attention, clear weather's to be looked for. But if she's deployed in extended order of skirmish-line, don't you go nowheres without your slicker."

On the present occasion the sergeant was also in the hall listening to the Secretary. To him had fallen the responsibility of conducting some of the recruits to Fort Chiricahua in Arizona, to which post they had been assigned. Captain Stone was on leave, and had no responsibilities whatever until in a few weeks he should return to that same post after a honeymoon which he and his bride were completing by a visit to the lady's parents. She was a pastor's daughter and played the melodeon.

"We are comrades," repeated the Secretary of War to the recruits, "and that means you and I are going to stand by each other through thick and thin." It sounded so well that the recruits all cheered.

The captain's mustache lifted a couple of hairs more, Sergeant Jones in another part of the hall whispered to himself two words which I cannot repeat, and the Secretary looked about to see if there was a flag anywhere convenient for his popular climax about earnest faces and the stars in Old Glory. But there was no flag, and he therefore selected another of the many strings to his oratorical bow. He gave them his great "What I am for" speech, the speech which had

brought the gallery down at Albany on Decoration Day, had caught the crowd at Terre Haute on the Fourth of July, swept Minneapolis on Labor Day and turned Dallas, Texas, hoarse on Washington's Birthday. In it the Secretary asked, "What am I for?" and then answered the question. He was to watch over the enlisted man, he was to be his father and protect him from military tyranny. Superior officers were to cease their despotic methods. Was this not a republic where one man was as good as another? The very term "superior officer" was repugnant to the American idea, and no offender of any grade should hide behind it as long as he was Secretary of War. To hear him you would have supposed that until he stepped into the Cabinet the slave under the lash knew a better lot than the American soldier. To be sure, he did not always say these remarkable things in the same way. At Boston, for instance, he would draw it milder than at Billings, Montana. At Boston he mentioned other duties of the Secretary of War besides that of tucking the enlisted man in his bed every night; but he seldom spoke in Boston, because he preferred a warm, heart-to-heart audience.

He knew at sight that he had one here. His

practised eye ran the recruits over and read their wholesome vacant up-country faces, noted their big rosy wrists, appraised their untrained juicy agricultural shapelessness as they sat beneath him like rows of cantaloupes and watermelons. With such innocence as this, he knew that he could spread it thick; and very soon after the preliminary details about his always having cherished a peculiar affection for this part of the country, and how General Lee had had no warmer admirer than himself, he was spreading it unmistakably thick. By the time he had informed them that it was not colonels and generals to whom he bowed the knee, but the enlisted man, the so-called common soldier, whose bleeding feet had blazed the trail for liberty with fearless shouts of triumph, Sergeant Jones was muttering to his neighbor, "How long more d'yu figure he'll slobber?" and the captain's mustache was standing out from his face like a shelf.

"That is what I am for!" perorated the wet-nurse. "I am for the enlisted man. The country looks to our beloved Purresident, but you look to me. Go forth, young men, for I am behind every one of you. No so-called military regulations shall insult your American manhood or grind

you down while I stand sentinel at my post. If you are troubled, come to me and you shall have your rights. Go forth then, you who outshine their vaunted Cæsars, their licentious Alexanders, their pagan Plutos and Aspasias! Go forth to be the bulwarks and imperishable heroes of our gullorious country!"

The watermelons cheered, the wet-nurse stepped down to let them shake his hand, and Captain Stone went home with his bride, in a speechless rage. He was able to speak presently.

"Still, Joshua," she mildly insisted, "young soldiers have so many sad temptations, I am glad he has their welfare at heart."

"Nonsense, Gwendolen," said the captain. "You'll soon know the army, and you'll see then that such talk as his merely turns contented men into discontented babies."

"Nobody could ever be discontented with you, Joshua, I am sure," the bride, with sweet emotion, murmured.

She was nineteen, the captain was forty-five, and upon gazing at the rosy cheeks of his Gwendolen he would frequently assert that a man was always as young as he felt.

The Secretary, after inspecting the military

post, dined with the mayor of the neighboring town. At this meal, when a cold bottle had been finished, the mayor went so far as to inquire: "Say, who was Aspasia?"

But the Secretary answered: "What a wonderful land is ours and what a beautiful city is yours."

II. The Energy is Transmitted

The expectations of Sergeant Jones were entirely unfulfilled. Much experience in taking charge of recruits upon long railway journeys had taught him that their earnest faces were not always more stirring than the stars upon Old Glory; he knew that you do not invariably find that sort of face for thirteen dollars a month. He had generally been obliged to watch their purchases at way stations, he had not seldom been forced to remove bottles of strong spirits from their possession, and he had almost always found it necessary to teach some of them a lesson in obedience. Judge therefore of the sergeant's amazement when, after the first half day of journey, a long overgrown ruddy boy approached him and asked in unsoiled Southern accents: "Please, sah, can we sing?"

"Sing?" said Jones. "Sing what?"

"'Pull foah the shoah, sailah.' We have learned to do it in parts back in our home."

"Yes," said Jones, "I guess you can sing that — in parts or as a whole."

"We sing it as a whole in parts, sah," explained the recruit with simplicity.

"Your name Anniston?" Jones inquired, abruptly suspicious.

"Bateau, sah. Leonidas Bateau. My cousin, Xerxes Anniston, sits over yonder by the watah-coolah."

"Oh," said Jones.

"Yes, sah. Xerx he sings bass in our choir back in our home. Sistah Smith —"

"Who?" said the sergeant.

"Sistah Smith, sah, the wife of our ministah, Tullius C. Smith."

"Oh," said the sergeant.

"She is leadah of our choir back in our home. She is our best soprano, Sistah Mingory is our best alto, and Brother Macon Lafayette Young gets two notes lowah than any of our basses. He keeps the choicest grocery in town and is president of our Y. M. C. A. You'd ought to heard our quartet in the prayer from 'Moses in

Egypt,' arranged by Sistah Mingory last Eastah Sunday."

The thoroughly good heart of Jones now warmed to this recruit. (I cannot hope that you will remember Jones. He was Specimen Jones long ago, before he joined the Army. Some of his doings are chronicled elsewhere. He is an old member of the family.) "Made Moses hum, did y'u?" said he. "I'll bet the girls would sooner have a solo from you than from Brother what's-his-name Lafayette."

"Sistah Smith," replied Leonidas, blushing like the innocent watermelon that he was, "did say that she couldn't see how they were going to get along without my uppah registah."

Jones settled back in his seat. "Sing away," said he.

Many songs were sung through Alabama and Louisiana and Texas; virtuous songs with no offending or even convivial word, and none so frequently demanded by the passengers as a solo from Leonidas,

How little do I love this vale of tears,

through which the chorus crooned a murmuring accompaniment. West of San Antonio, they

played a game of riddles, and when Cousin Xerxes (who seemed the wit of the party) asked, "Why is Dass's solo like Texas? Because it's all in flats," and the recruits were convulsed with merriment by this, Sergeant Jones, listening to them in his seat behind, muttered with compassion: "Their mothers could hear every word they say." And friendliness was established between him and the recruits. They confided many things to him.

Yes; not a drop of vice's poison flowed in them, but at El Paso, while they waited, Leonidas, on saying to Jones, "What an elegant speech the Secretary of War gave us!" was astonished to hear the sergeant burst into strong language.

"That hypercrite!" exclaimed Jones. And the shocked Leonidas answered him.

And now began to fall the first chill upon their friendliness. The recruits were clean from vice, but the Secretary's poison was at work, the sugar of self-pity he had given them to swallow, the false sentiment over themselves, the sick notion they were objects of special sympathy, instead of stout young lads beginning life with about as many helps and hindrances as other stout young lads.

"Yes, he did say so!" declared Leonidas. "Yes, he did, sah. He said he'd take care we was treated like gentlemen. He said he was behind us. And I guess he's the man to back up his word."

"Well," said Jones, making a final try, "I'll tell y'u." And he laid a hand on the young man's shoulder. "A man enlists to be a soldier — nothin' else. Not to be a gentleman, but just a soldier who obeys his orders — and nothin' else. I obey the captain, and he obeys the colonel, and he obeys the commanding general of the department, and so it goes clean to the top, and we're all soldiers obeyin' the President of the United States, and if bein' a gentleman consists in makin' things as pleasant and easy for others as y'u can, why, the chap in the army who obeys best is the best gentleman. There's remedies for injustice all right, but you keep thinkin' about your duties and you'll not need to think about your remedies. Understand?"

"Yes, sah," said Leonidas, without the faintest sign of comprehension. "But the Secretary is at the top and it's right in him to say the top should nevah forget to recognize the onaliable rights of the bottom. He said he was behind us."

"Oh, go sit down and give us some of your upper register!" cried Jones.

Thus did friendliness give place to estrangement. The watermelons laid their heads together and assured Leonidas that he had acted in a proper and spirited manner. In Sergeant Jones they confided no longer, for which he was man enough to lay the blame where it belonged. He handsomely cursed the Secretary of War, but what good did that do?

Arrived at Fort Chiricahua, the recruits fell into safe hands, though not perhaps entirely wise ones. The post chaplain was an earnest preacher of the same denomination as the Rev. Tullius C. Smith, and delighted to surround Leonidas and his band with the same customs and influences which they had known at home. They were soon known throughout the post as "The Shouters." This epithet came from their choir singing, which was no whit lessened by their new and not wholly religious environment. If Sergeant Jones or Captain Stone had looked for insubordination as a result of the Secretary's speech, it was an agreeable disappointment. The recruits were punctual, they were clean, they were assiduous at drill, they showed intelligence, they were model,

both as youths and soldiers, and nothing kept them from a more than common popularity in their various troops unless it was that they were a little too model for the taste of the average enlisted man. The parade-ground was constantly melodious with their week-day practising for Sabbath exercises. Sister Smith had sent them much music from home, and the post learned to admire "Moses in Egypt" as arranged by Sister Mingory and interpreted by the upper register of Leonidas.

One person there was whom the strains of psalmody, as they floated from the open windows of the school-room, did not wholly please. Captain Stone disapproved of his Gwendolen's spending so much time alone with the melodeon and Leonidas. Almost as fittingly might a Senator's wife sing duets with her coachman, and all the ladies of the Post knew this — excepting Gwendolen! But he could not forbid her, at least not yet. Was she not his bride of scarce three months? In this new army world, where he had brought her so far from everything that she had always known, how could he deprive her of one great resource, he who had cut her off from so many? Time would steadily teach

her the conduct suitable for an officer's wife, and then of her own accord she would put the proper distance between herself and the enlisted men.

"It is so unexpected, Joshua," she said once, "such an unexpected joy to be able to keep a good influence around those poor boys."

"What do you call them poor boys for?" inquired the captain.

"To come into so many temptations so far from home!" she exclaimed.

"They're not going to have you and the chaplain and the organ all their lives, Gwendolen."

"Now, Joshua, keep your mustache down! The Secretary of War — don't swear so dreadfully, darling! Don't!" And the bride stopped her lord's lips with her hand. "I won't mention him any more," she promised. "I must run now, or I'll be late for practising next Sunday's anthem with Leonidas Bateau."

Left on the porch of his quarters, the captain made the same remark about next Sunday's anthem that he had made about the Secretary of War; but Gwendolen, having departed, did not hear him, and soon from the open windows of the school-house floated the chords of the melodeon

with a chorus led by Cousin Xerxes, and a solo on an upper register,

How little do I love this vale of teahs.

Would Gwendolen have been so eager to redeem some dried-up middle-aged sinner? I don't know. At any rate, in her solicitude for the spotless Leonidas, she was abreast with the advanced Philanthropy which holds prevention better than cure. Of course, not even to the most evil-minded could scandal arise from any of this. But when you see a wife of nineteen playing the organ for a trooper of twenty-two, and a husband of forty-five constantly remarking that a man is always as young as he feels, why, then you are at no great distance from comedy, and the joke draws nearer when the wife is anxious that the trooper should not feel the want of his mother, and the trooper retains the limpid innocence of the watermelon. The ladies of the Post tried to be indignant that an officer's wife should so much associate herself with enlisted men, but they could only laugh — and hush when the captain came by, and the men in barracks laughed — and hushed when the captain came by, and the poor captain knew it all. Meanwhile, the melodeon played on, the watermelons lifted

their harmless hymns, and in the heart of Leonidas the Secretary's speech dwelled like honey but like gall in the heart of the captain. Had Captain Stone dreamed what sweet familiarity the hymns were breeding, he — but he did not dream, hence was his awakening all the more pronounced.

The day it came had made an ill beginning with him. He had walked unexpectedly into the kitchen before breakfast, and found there his Chinaman putting a finishing crust on the breakfast rolls. He had never been aware of such a process. He had always particularly enjoyed the crust. The Chinaman had just reached the point where he withdrew the hot rolls from the oven and sprayed them suddenly with cold water from his mouth. There had ensued a dreadful time in the kitchen, and no rolls for breakfast and no Chinaman for dinner, and even as late as five o'clock the captain's mustache had not completely flattened down. Leonidas should have observed this as he came up the captain's steps with a message from the chaplain for the captain's wife. They were waiting for her to come over and play the melodeon for Sunday's anthem.

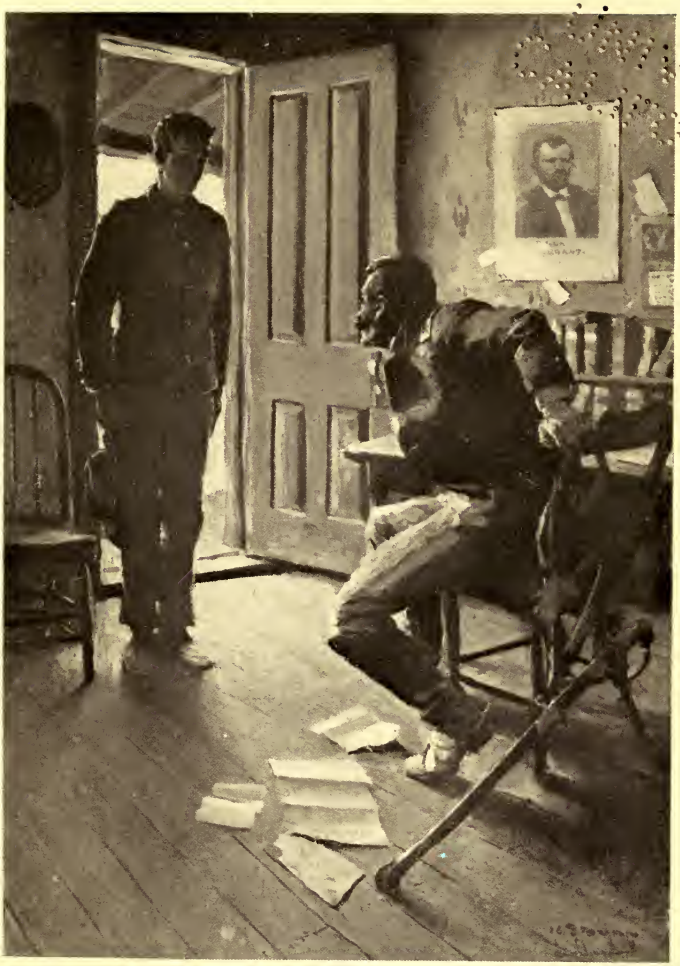
"Is Sistah Stone here?" Leonidas inquired.

"WHO?" said the captain, rising from his chair, which fell backward with the movement.

"Is Sistah Stone here?" repeated Leonidas, mildly. "The chaplain says—"

You will meet the most conflicting accounts of the spot where Leonidas first landed on firm ground after leaving the captain's boot. The colonel's orderly, who was standing in front of the colonel's gate four houses farther up the line, deposed that he "thought he heard a something but didn't see what made it." Mrs. Phillips declared she was sitting on her porch two houses down the line, and "it looked just like diving from a spring-board." These were the only two disinterested witnesses. The afflicted Leonidas claimed that he had gone from the porch clean over the front gate, and Captain Stone said that he didn't know and didn't care, but that if the gate story was true, then he had projected one hundred and sixty pounds forty measured feet and felt younger than ever.

The version which Jones gave has (to me) always seemed wholly satisfactory. "Don't y'u go sittin' up nights over it," said Jones. "Nobody'll never prove where he struck. But what



"Is Sistah Stone heah?" Leonidas inquired

I seen was the captain come ragin' out of his gate. He went over to the officers' club and I knowed it was particular, for y'u could have stood a vase of flowers on his muss-tash without spillin' a drop. And next comes Leonidas a-flyin' by me, a-screechin', 'The Secretary shall hear of this!' And I seen the mark on his pants and he tells me. 'Hard brushin' will remove it,' I says to him, and he says, 'The Secretary shall hear of it!' And I says, 'Well, Leonidas, it sure ain't your upper register that's damaged.' 'The Secretary,' says he, but I got tired. 'If you was figuring to be the captain's brother-in-law,' I says, 'you should have bruck it to him gently.'"

III. The Vibrations Spread

And what did the afflicted Leonidas do now? Sunday's anthem was dashed from his mind. They waited for him, but he never came back, nor was the melodeon again played by Sister Stone. Leonidas, without waiting to brush off anything, hastened to his own troop commander, told of the insult to American manhood and displayed the grievous traces upon his trousers. When his captain found that he was not demented, he meditated briefly and spoke.

"Bateau, this is unfortunate, but it seems to me out of military cognizance."

Leonidas mentioned the Secretary of War for the third or fourth time, and asked permission to complain to the post commander.

"Think this over for a day," said his troop commander, "and I'll see Captain Stone." On the next day he resumed, "Captain Stone confirms every statement that you make, except — er — the distance."

"It was ovah the gate," repeated Leonidas. "But I would feel just the same if it was not."

The troop commander was wise. "Very well. You have my permission to make your complaint."

Private Bateau stated his case in the Adjutant's office at Fort Chiricahua. The post commander duly investigated the affair, and private Bateau was duly informed that his complaint was deemed out of military cognizance. Private Bateau, thoroughly booked on the machinery, now appealed to the Department Commander. He called in no clerk to draft his grievance for him; with Cousin Xerxes to help, he wrote:

"FORT CHIRICAHUA, A. T., Nov. 30, 188–.

"THE ADJUTANT-GENERAL, Department of Arizona, Whipple Barracks, A. T. (Through Military Channels.)

"*Sir.* — For the information of the commanding general of the department, I wish to report Captain Joshua Stone of E Troop 4th Cavalry for using brutal conduct toward me at 5 p.m. 26th inst., at witch hour he insulted me with his foot behaiving like no officer and gentleman in a way I will not rite down. All I did was bring word our choir was waiting for Mrs. Stone to play like she always done on the melodeum for church practiss wensday afternoons and saturday nights."

"Very respectfully, your obedient servant,
"LEONIDAS BATEAU, Private, Troop I, 4th Cav'y."

This document Leonidas handed to the first sergeant of his troop, who took it with the daily morning report to the captain, who indorsed it, "Respectfully forwarded to the Adjutant-General Department of Arizona (through Post Commander). The facts in this case are as follows," etc., and duly signed the indorsement, and forwarded it the next day to the Post Commander, who indorsed it, "Respectfully forwarded to the Adju-

tant-General Department of Arizona, Whipple Barracks, A. T. I find upon investigation," etc., "and I have cautioned Private Leonidas Bateau that he ought to be more guarded in his language when referring to an officer's wife, and I recommend that no further action be taken in this case."

Do you perceive the wheels beginning to go round? The letter of Leonidas, thus twice indorsed and signed by the captain of his troop and the colonel commanding Fort Chiricahua, now flew forth and upward, directing its course duly to the headquarters of the Department of Arizona, and even while it was upon its way, a new song was heard among the enlisted men on all sides at the post. It was fitted to the tune of "Stables," its author was unknown, and it went something like this:

SAY, have you seen my sister?
I GUESS that I must have missed her,
I'll SHOW you a handsome blister, etc.

It went something like that (sing it and you will see how glove-like it fits the tune), and it contributed nothing to the happiness of Leonidas; but it made him glad that nobody save Cousin Xerxes knew of the long, long letter which he had writ-

ten to the Secretary of War and mailed outside the post.

And now the wheels began to turn at Whipple Barracks while Private Bateau was waiting for the Secretary of War to answer his private letter, and stand behind him. The Department Commander knew all about the Secretary of War; moreover, he was enlightened concerning this case by his favorite staff-officer, Lieutenant Jimmy St. Michael, of Kings Port, South Carolina. Jimmy received from a brother lieutenant at Fort Chiricahua an intimate and spirited account of the whole deplorable misadventure, describing Gwendolen at length, and Captain Stone at length, and the melodeon, and the choir practices, not omitting a sketch of Leonidas and Cousin Xerxes. This letter kept the young officers up until past midnight, for Jimmy gave them a choir practice upon his banjo, impersonating now Sistah Stone and now Leonidas. But, as I have said, the Commanding General of the Department knew the Secretary of War and therefore deemed a plentiful investigation into the affairs of Leonidas the wisest course. He would not accept the views of the post commander, as was his usual habit; there must be an inspector. Now his Inspector-

General was off inspecting something at Fort Apache ; and so, that time should not be lost, he summoned Jimmy St. Michael and directed him to proceed to Fort Chiricahua. Jimmy departed with a valise, a letter official to the colonel, a message unofficial to the same officer, and his banjo, which he rarely left behind him. With the solemnity proper to all inspectors, he arrived upon the scene of the tragedy, and not even the joy of the club could unbend him. He was implored to give at least "But he didn't saw the wood," that song which had left a trail of gayety from Klamath and Bidwell to Meade and San Carlos. Jimmy remained deaf to everything but duty. His slim figure became every inch an inspector, his neat hair was severe, his black eyes almost funereal. He made many inquiries, he investigated everybody, and he seldom uttered any longer comment than "H'm, h'm!" He knew how rare it is for an inspector to say more than this.

His old friends would have thought him engaged to be married or otherwise grievously changed for the worse, had he not, on the night his mission was ended, taken the cover off his banjo. He gave the second entirely original poem which the misfortunes of Leonidas had inspired. He sang

it to a tune heard in a popular play, and here it is:

Of War I am the popular Secretaree — O.
I am the popularest man in all the show.
There were one or two or three
More popular than me
Till I received my portofolee — O.

George Washington, they say, was popular long ago.
His name to-day is sometimes mentioned still, I know.
But where d'you think he'll be
If he's compared with me,
When I resign my portofolee — O?

The very day that I into the White House go
My friends shall see my gratitude is never slow;
And chief of all their clan
Shall be the enlisted man,
For he shall have my portofolee — O!

Even Joshua smiled, and Joshua was a solemn man, not to speak of his delicate position regarding Leonidas. He sat up late, drank to the health of Jimmy St. Michael, and remarked that he doubted if Jimmy felt any younger than he did.

But the hour for poor Leonidas to smile had not yet come. There was silence most unaccountable from the Secretary of War, and the encouragement given by having an inspector come several hundred miles received presently a rude shock.

Jimmy St. Michael returned to Whipple Barracks and made a carefully solemn report to the Commanding General; but at the end of it, seeing that the Commanding General's solemnity was less careful, he ceased to be an inspector, and said with his engaging Kings Port accent:

"General, did you ever put sugar on a raw oyster and try to swallow it?"

"It can't be done!" declared the General. "I've known that since I was at the Military Academy."

"It can be done, sir, if you will pardon my contradicting you. I did it myself on a bet at the Military Academy."

"Good Lord!" said the General. "What was it like?"

"I realized, sir, that the combination does not belong in Nature's plan, any more than mixing politics with the United States Army."

"Ha, ha!" went the General. "Ha, ha! Not in Nature's plan!" And he proceeded to drop the necessary lemon-juice upon the Secretary's luckless raw oyster.

To poor Leonidas's original letter was now added a third duly dated indorsement: "Respectfully returned to the commanding officer, Fort

Chiricahua, A. T. The Commanding General approves of your action in this case. The provoking speech of Priv't Leonidas Bateau, Troop I, 4th Cav'y, on the occasion of his visiting the quarters of his troop commander being considered sufficient grounds for the harsh treatment administered." This, with the signature of the Assistant Adjutant-General, arrived at Fort Chiricahua, and was followed by a fourth indorsement dated there and signed by the Post Adjutant: "Respectfully returned to the commanding officer, Troop I, 4th Cav'y, inviting attention to the 2d and 3d indorsements hereon, the contents of which will be communicated to Pvt. Leonidas Bateau, Troop I, 4th Cav. By order of," etc.

The wheels of redress had turned, all the wheels, and ground out nothing. His troop commander sent for Leonidas and read him the indorsements. Leonidas, being instructed by a "guard-house lawyer," demanded his papers, which were delivered to him, as was his right. These now went with his appeal to Washington. For Leonidas had written home to Sistah Smith, who had written to a Congressman, who had replied that he was ever for justice. Thus, with a long new letter from Leonidas to the Secretary of War (whose

silence still remained unaccountable), did official tidings of the outrage to American manhood at length, through the Adjutant General's Department, come to the man of the "portofolee—O."

Buttons were pressed and clerks despatched with messages; and there ensued a conference between the Congressman, the Adjutant-General, the Secretary of War, and the Lieutenant-General himself. The Congressman stated the case; the Secretary was quite uneasy, and talked a great deal, taking care not to express a single idea; but the Lieutenant-General was quite easy and talked only thus much:

"Called her his sister? Got kicked? I should think so!"

"General, this is good in you to help us," said the Secretary, with symptoms of relief. "I did not wish to reach this conclusion without your corroboration."

Thus ended the conference. The original letter of Leonidas with its four indorsements pasted on it, and making quite a budget, now started its return course bearing a fifth indorsement containing the Secretary of War's opinion signed by one of the Assistant Adjutants-General. It travelled through the back channels that you know, passing

Whipple Barracks and reaching the hungry, unsated Leonidas many weeks after all traces had vanished from his trousers. During these weeks his life had been made a sorry thing by that song about the blister. Not even the sympathy of Cousin Xerxes could sweeten his embittered days. They were wholesome for him, to be sure; they began to cure him of being a watermelon; they even gave him gradually a just estimate of the Secretary's speech at McPherson, and he grew into a strapping young trooper with many of the trooper's habits in moderation. The only profane language that he used was in connection with the Secretary of War, whose tricky official language in his indorsement had utterly dodged his promise to stand behind him. But Leonidas could not comfortably live in a place where everybody remembered how he had (as Jones put it) "run around showing his pants." He took his discharge at the first opportunity, and became an eminent cow-boy in the neighborhood, with a man's full strength in his sinews, and a man's anger silent in his heart. The hour for him to smile had not yet come.

IV. The Energy is Once Again Transmitted

You will doubtless have perceived the flaw in the Secretary's conduct before I can point it out to you. He should have written a letter to poor Leonidas with his own hand. It might not have been the easiest kind of letter for you or for me to compose; but for a statesman of the Secretary's ripeness it ought to have been the affair of five minutes. A few words of deep sympathy, a few words of hot indignation, a few words of sincere regret that he had not yet had time to remove all the obstructions which a despotic tradition set between him and the enlisted man — and, best of all, a few words of promise to see Leonidas on his coming tour through the Southwest — such a letter as this would have made Leonidas proud and happy, and comforted forever the tingling sensations that pierced him whenever he thought of his final choir practice. But as Leonidas seemed no longer of any possible use to the Secretary, the Secretary forgot all about him!

It was not understood at the ranch where Leonidas was now employed, why he so eagerly followed the printed chronicle of the Secretary's

approach. Indeed, had you asked him to explain it himself, I doubt if he could have done so: the needle seeks the pole — but why? He would pore over the Tucson paper and learn how the Secretary had visited San Antonio and spoken to the soldiers there; how he had paused at El Paso, and spoken to the soldiers there; how he had visited Bayard, Bowie, and Grant, and spoken at all three; and how he was expected on the train from Benson on the very next day, and would get off at Chiricahua station and drive to the post; how he would return thence and proceed to Lowell Barracks on his way to Yuma and Los Angeles.

All this programme was of natural interest to the officers and men at Fort Chiricahua, but it seemed of unnatural interest to Leonidas. Concerning his absorption the other cow-boys passed comments among themselves, but made none to him, because he had altogether ceased to be a watermelon.

The smoke of a train in that country is to be sighted from a great distance and for some time before you can see the train, because the smoke is very black and the train goes very slowly. Also, the dust of a horseman or a vehicle can

be descried from afar. As the smoke of the Secretary's train approached the Chiricahua station, the dust of a seemly military escort drew near from the direction of the post, and the dust of a galloping cow-boy came along the road from the ranch where Leonidas was employed. By the platform of the station was assembled a little group of citizens hoping for a speech; and by the time the train made its deliberate arrival complete, the escort was arrayed with due military precision, the ambulance was at hand near by, for the Secretary to step into when he should feel ready, and a captain with two lieutenants was preparing to salute the eminent statesman as he alighted from the car. He returned their greeting, and as he stepped forward to the end of the platform from which elevation he desired to say a few cordial and timely words to those waiting in the surrounding dust, the cow-boy entered the ticket office, but came out again on the platform, which was natural, since the ticket window was at the moment closed. The sight of the Secretary produced an immediate effect upon the appearance of the cow-boy. He seemed to grow larger.

"Friends and soldiers," said the Secretary, "I

am always moved when I see an enlisted man —" and even with the words, he was moved conspicuously through the air and came down in the dust in a seated position. The leg of Leonidas had grown exceedingly muscular. Before anybody had regained his senses, the cow-boy was seen to dash away shouting on his horse across the railroad track, and pursuit did not overtake him. I am not sure if this was the fault of Captain Stone or Sergeant Jones, both of whom were in the chase.

It gravely damaged the Secretary's visit for him, but rendered it for many others a memorable success, especially for Captain Stone and Sergeant Jones. And Jones made so bold as to remark to Stone: "I think, if the captain pleases, that the Secretary won't never stand behind Leonidas like Leonidas has stood behind him."

"It is a great thing for a man to feel young," replied Captain Stone. His mustache was flat, smiling and serene.

Nobody knows whether or not the Secretary considered this mixing of politics and the army to be in Nature's plan.

IV

TIMBERLINE

It was a yellow poster, still wet with the rain. Against the wet, dark boards of the shed on which it was pasted, its color glared like a patch of flame.

A monstrous thunderstorm had left all space dumb and bruised, as it were, with the heavy blows of its noise. Outside the station in the washed, fresh air I sat waiting, staring idly at the poster. The damp seemed to make the yellow paper yellower, the black letters blacker. A dollar-sign, figures and zeros, exclamation points, and the two blackest words of all, *reward* and *murder*, were what stood out of the yellow. Reward and Murder had been printed big and could be seen far. Two feet away, on the same shed, was another poster, white, concerning some stallion, his place of residence, and the fee for his service. This also I had read, with equal inattention and idleness, but my eyes had been drawn to the yellow spot and held by it.

Not by its news; the news was now old, since

at every cabin and station dotted along our lonely road the same poster had appeared. They had discussed it, and whether he would be caught, and how much money he had got from his victim. At Lost Soldier they knew he had got ten thousand dollars, at Bull Spring they knew he had got twenty, at Crook's Gap it was more like twenty-five, while at Sweetwater Bridge he had got nothing at all. What they did agree about was that he would not be caught. Too much start. Body hadn't been found on Owl Creek for a good many weeks. Funny his friend hadn't turned up. If they'd killed him, why wasn't his body on Owl Creek, too? If he'd got away, why didn't he turn up? Such comments, with many more, were they making at Lost Soldier, Bull Spring, Crook's Gap, and Sweetwater Bridge, and it was not the news on the poster that drew my eye, but its mere yellow vibrations. These, in some way, caught my brain in a net and held it still, so that thinking stopped, and I was under a spell, torpid as any plant or sponge — passive, perhaps, is the truer word for my state.

When I was abruptly wakened from this open-eyed sleep, I knew that I had been hearing a song for some time: —

If that I was where I would be,
  Then should I be where I am not;
Here am I where I must be,
  And where I would be I cannot.

It was the neigh of some horse in the stable, loud and sudden, that had burst the shell of my trance, causing thought to start to life again, as if with a leap; there I sat in the wagon, waiting for Scipio Le Moyne to come out of the house; there in my nostrils was the smell of the wet sage-brush and of the wet straw and manure, and there, against the gray sky, was an after-image of the yellow poster, square, huge, and blue. The smaller print was not reproduced, but Reward and Murder stood out clear, floating in the air. It moved with my eyes as I turned them to get rid of the annoying vision, and it at last slowly dissolved away over the head of the figure sitting on the corral with its back to me, the stock-tender of this stage station. It wore out as I listened to his song, and looked at him. He sang his song again, and I found that I now knew it by heart.

If that I was where I would be,
  Then should I be where I am not;
Here am I where I must be,
  And where I would be I cannot.

"If that was where I would be, then should I be where I am not"

In the mountains, beyond the sage-brush, the thunderstorm was still splitting the dark cañons open with fierce strokes of light; the light seemed close, but it was a long time before its crashes and echoes came to us through the wet air. I could not see the figure's face, or that he moved. One boot was twisted between the bars of the corral to hold him steady, its trodden heel was worn to a slant; from one seat-pocket a soiled rag protruded, and through a hole below this a piece of his red shirt or drawers stuck out. A coat much too large for him hung from his neck rather than from his shoulders, and the damp, limp hat that he wore, with its spotted, unraveled hatband, somehow completed the suggestion that he was not alive at all, but had been tied together and stuffed and set out in joke. Certainly there were no birds here, or crops to frighten birds from; empty bottles were the only thing that man had sown the desert with at Rongis.[1] These lay everywhere. As the figure sat and repeated its song beneath the still wrecked and stricken sky, its back and its hat and its voice gave an impres-

[1] For reasons, those who in 188— named this place after its chief inhabitant, wished to disguise his name. This they accomplished by changing the order of the letters which spelled it.

sion of loneliness, poignant and helpless. A windmill turned and turned and creaked near the corral, adding its note of forlornness to the song.

A man put his head out of the house. "Stop it," he said, and shut the door again.

The figure obediently climbed down and went over to the windmill, took hold of the rope hanging from its rudder, and turned the contrivance slowly out of the wind, until the wheel ceased revolving. I saw then that he was a boy.

The man put his head out of the house, this second time speaking louder: "I didn't say stop *that*, I said stop *it;* stop your damned singing." He withdrew his head immediately.

The boy — the mild, new yellow hair on his face was the unshaven growth of adolescence — stood a long while looking at the door in silence, with eyes and mouth expressing futile injury. Finally he thrust his hands into bunchy pockets, and said: —

"I ain't no two-bit man."

He watched the door, as if daring it to deny this; then, as nothing happened, he slowly drew his hands from the bunchy pockets, climbed the corral at the spot nearest him, twisted the boot

between the bars, and sat as before, only without singing.

The cloud and the thunder were farther away, but around us still, from unseen places, roofs and corners, dropped the leavings of the downpour. We faced each other, saying nothing; we had nothing to say. In the East we would have talked, but here in the Rocky Mountains an admirable habit of silence was generally observed under such conditions.

Thus we sat waiting, I for Scipio to come out of the house with the information he had gone in for, while the boy waited for nothing. *Waiting for nothing* was stamped plain upon him from head to foot, as it is stamped upon certain figures all the world over — figures seated in clubs, standing at corners, leaning against railroad stations and boxes of freight, staring out of windows. Those in the clubs die at last, and it is mentioned; the others of course die, too, only it is not mentioned. This boy's eyebrows were insufficient, and his front was as ragged as his back.

Presently the same man put his head out of the door. "You after sheep?"

I nodded.

"I could a-showed you sheep. Rams. Horns as big as your thigh — bigger'n *your* thigh. That was before tenderfeet came in and spoiled this country. Counted seven thousand on that there butte one morning before breakfast. Seven thousand and twenty-three, if you want exact figgers. Set on this porch and killed sheep whenever I wanted to. Some of 'em used to come on the roof. Counted eight rams on the roof one morning before breakfast. Quit your staring!" This was addressed to the boy on the corral. "Why, you're not a-going without another?" This convivial question was to Scipio, who now came out of the house and across to me with news of failure.

"I could a-showed you sheep —" resumed the man, but I was attending to Scipio.

"He don't know anything," said Scipio, "nor any of 'em in there. But we haven't got this country rounded up yet. He's just come out of a week of snake fits, and, by the way it looks, he'll enter on another about to-morrow morning. But whiskey can't stop *him* lying."

"Bad weather," said the man, watching us make ready to continue our long drive. "Lots o' lightning loose in the air right now. Kind o'

weather you're liable to see fire on the horns of the stock some night."

This sounded like such a promising invention that I encouraged him. "We have nothing like that in the East."

"H'm. Guess you've not. Guess you never seen sixteen thousand steers with a light at the end of every horn in the herd."

"Are they going to catch that man?" inquired Scipio, pointing to the yellow poster.

"Catch him? Them? No! But I could tell 'em where he's went. He's went to Idaho."

"Thought the '76 outfit had sold Auctioneer," Scipio continued conversationally.

"That stallion? No! But I could tell 'em they'd ought to." This was his good-by to us; he removed himself and his alcoholic omniscience into the house.

"Wait," I said to Scipio, as he got in and took the reins from me. "I'm going to deal some magic to you. Look at that poster. No, not the stallion, the yellow one. Keep looking at it hard." While he obeyed me I made solemn passes with my hands over his head. I kept it up, and the boy sat on the corral bars, watching stupidly. "Now look anywhere you please."

Scipio looked across the corral at the gray sky. A slight stiffening of his figure ensued, and he knit his brows. Then he rubbed a hand over his eyes and looked again.

"You after sheep?" It was the boy sitting on the corral. We paid him no attention.

"It's about gone," said Scipio, rubbing his eyes again. "Did you do that to me? Of course y'u didn't! What did?"

I adopted the manner of the professor who lectured on light to me when I was nineteen. "The eye being normal in structure and focus, the color of an after-image of the negative variety is complementary to that of the object causing it. If, for instance, a yellow disk (or lozenge in this case) be attentively observed, the yellow-perceiving elements of the retina become fatigued. Hence, when the mixed rays which constitute white light fall upon that portion of the retina which has thus been fatigued, the rays which produce the sensation of yellow will cause less effect than the other rays for which the eye has not been fatigued. Therefore, white light to an eye fatigued for yellow will appear blue — blue being yellow's complementary color. Shall I go on?"

"Don't y'u!" Scipio begged. "I'd sooner believe y'u done it to me."

"I can show you sheep." It was the boy again. We had not noticed him come from the corral to our wagon, by which he now stood. His eyes were now eagerly fixed upon me; as they looked into mine they seemed almost burning with some sort of appeal.

"Hello, Timberline!" said Scipio, not at all unkindly. "Still holding your job here? Well, you better stick to it. You're inclined to drift some."

He touched the horses, and we left the boy standing and looking after us, lonely and baffled. But when a joke was born in Scipio it must out:

"Say, Timberline," he called back, "better insure your clothes. Y'u couldn't replace 'em."

"I'm no two-bit man," retorted the boy with anger — that pitiful anger which feels a blow but cannot give one.

We drove away along the empty stage-road, with the mountains and the dying storm, in which a piece of setting sun would redly glow and vanish, making our leftward horizon, and to our right the great undulations of a world so large as to seem the universe itself. The air was wet

still, and full of the wet sage-brush smell, and the ground was wet, but it could not be so long in this sandy region. Three hours would see us to the next house, unless we camped short of this upon Broke Axle Creek.

"Why Timberline?" I asked after several miles.

"Well, he came into this country the long, lanky, innocent kid like you saw him, and he'd always get too tall in the legs for his latest pair of pants. They'd be half up to his knees. So we called him that. Guess he's most forgot his real name."

"What is his real name?"

"I've quite forgot."

This much talk did for us for two or three miles more.

"Must it be yellow?" Scipio asked then.

"Red'll do it, too," I answered. "Only you see green then, I think. And there are others."

"H'm," observed Scipio. "Most as queer as chemistry. D' y'u know chemistry?"

"Why, what do you know?"

"Just the embalmin' side. Didn't y'u know I assisted an undertaker wunst in Kansas City?"

"What's that?" I interrupted sharply, for something out in the darkness had jumped.

"Does a stray steer scare you like that to-night? Now, that embalmin' trick give me a notion I'll work out some time. What do you miss worst in camp grub?"

"Eggs," said I, immediately.

"That's you. Well, I'm going to invent embalmed eggs — somehow."

"Hope you do," said I. "Do you believe I'm going to get sheep this time? It's all I came for."

"You'll get sheep," Scipio declared, "or I'll lose my job at Sunk Creek ranch." Judge Henry had lent him to me for my hunting trip. "Of course I'd not *call* 'em embalmed eggs," he finished.

"Condensed," I suggested. "Like the milk. Do you suppose the man really did go to Idaho?"

"They do go there — and they go everywheres else that's convenient — Canada, San Francisco, some Indian reservation. He'll never get found. I expect like as not he killed the confederate along with the victims — it's claimed there was a cook along, too. He's never showed up. It's a bad proposition to get tangled up with a murderer."

I sat thinking of this and that and the other.

"That was a superior lie about the lights on the steers' horns," I remarked next.

Scipio shoved one hand under his hat and scratched his head. "They say that's *so*," he said. "I've heard it. Never seen it. But—tell y'u—he ain't got brains enough to invent a thing like that. And he's too conceited to tell another man's lie."

"Well," I pondered, "there's Saint Elmo's fire. That's genuine."

Scipio desired to know about this, and I told him of the lights that are seen at the ends of the yards and spars of ships at sea in atmospheric conditions of a certain kind. He let me also tell him of the old Breton sailor belief that these lights are the souls of dead sailor-men come back to pray for the living in peril; but he stopped me soon when I attempted to speak of charged thunder clouds, and the positive, and the negative, and conductors, and Leyden jars. "That's a heap worse than the other stuff about yellow and blue," he objected. "Here's Broke Axle. D' y'u say camp here, or make it in to the station?"

"Well, if that filthy woman still keeps the station—"

"She does. She's a buck-skinned son-of-a-gun. We'll camp here, Professor."

Scipio had first called me by this name before

he knew me, in Colonel Cyrus Jones's Eating Palace in Omaha, intending no compliment by the term. Since that day many adventures and surprises shared together had changed it to a word of familiar regard; he used it sparingly, and as a rule only upon occasions of discomfort or mischance. "You'll get sheep, Professor," he now repeated in a voice of reassurance, and went his way to attend to the horses for the night.

The earth had dried, the plenteous stars were bright in the sky, we needed no tent over us, and merely spread my rubber blanket and the buffalo robes, and so beneath light covers waited for sleep to the gurgle, sluggish and musical, of Broke Axle. Scipio's sleep was superior to mine, coming sooner and burying him deeper from the world of wakefulness. Thus he did not become aware of a figure sitting by our little fire of embers, whose presence penetrated my thinner sleep until my eyes opened and saw it. Such things give me a shock, which, I suppose, must be fear, but it is not at all fear of the mind. I lay still, drawing my gun stealthily into a good position and thinking what were best to do; but he must have heard me.

"Lemme me show you sheep."

"What's that?" It was Scipio starting to life and action.

"Don't shoot Timberline," I said. "He's come to show us sheep."

Scipio sat staring stupefied at the figure by the embers, and then he slowly turned his head round to me, and I thought he was going to pour out one of those long, corrosive streams of comment that usually burst from him when he was enough surprised. But he was too much surprised. "His name is Henry Hall," he said to me very mildly. "I've just remembered it."

The patient figure by the embers rose. "There's sheep in the Washakie Needles. Lots and lots and lots. I seen 'em myself in the spring. I can take you right to 'em. Don't make me go back and be stock-tender." He recited all this in a sort of rising wail until the last sentence, in which the entreaty shook his voice.

"Washakie Needles is the nearest likely place," muttered Scipio.

"If you don't get any, you needn't to pay me any," urged the boy; and he stretched out an arm to mark his words and his prayer.

We sat in our beds and he stood waiting by the embers to hear his fate, while nothing made a sound but Broke Axle.

"Why not?" I said. "We were talking of a third man."

"A man," said Scipio. "Yes."

"I can cook, I can pack, I can cook good bread, and I can show you sheep, and if I don't you needn't to pay me a cent," entreated the boy.

"He sure means what he says," Scipio commented. "It's your trip."

Thus it was I came to hire Timberline.

Dawn showed him in the same miserable rags he wore on my first sight of him at the corral, and these proved his sole visible property of any kind; he didn't possess a change of anything, he hadn't brought away from Rongis so much as a handkerchief tied up with things inside it; most wonderful of all, he owned not even a horse — and in that country in those days five dollars' worth of horse was within the means of almost anybody.

But he was not unclean, as I had feared. He washed his one set of rags, and his skin-and-bones body, by the light of the first sun-

rise on Broke Axle, and this proved a not too rare habit with him, which made all the more strange his neglect to throw the rags away and wear the new clothes I bought and gave him as we passed through Lander.

"Timberline," said Scipio the next day, "if Anthony Comstock came up in this country he'd jail you."

"Who's he?" screamed Timberline, sharply.

"He lives in Noo York, and he's agin the nood. That costume of yours is getting close on to what they claim Venus and other immoral Greek statuary used to wear."

After this Timberline put on the Lander clothes, but on one of his wash-days we discovered that he kept the rags next his skin! This clinging to such worthless things seemed probably the result of destitution, of having had nothing, day after day and month after month. His poor little pay at Rongis, which we gradually learned they had always got back from him by one trick or another, was less than half what I now gave him for his services, and I offered to advance him some of this at places where it could be spent; but he told me to keep it until he had earned the whole of it.

Waiting for nothing was stamped plain upon him from head to foot

Yet he did not seem a miser; his willingness to help at anything in camp was unchanging, and a surer test of not being stingy was the indifference he showed to losing or winning the little sums we played at cards for after supper and before bed. The score I kept in my diary showed him to belong to the losing class. His help in camp was real, not merely well meant; the curious haze or blur in which his mind had seemed to be at the corral cleared away, and he was worth his wages. What he had said he could do, he did, and more. And yet, when I looked at him, he was somehow forever pitiful.

"Do you think anything is the matter with him?" I asked Scipio.

"Only just one thing. He'd oughtn't never to have been born."

"That probably applies to several million people all over this planet."

"Sure," assented Scipio cheerfully. He was not one of these.

"He's so eternally silent!" I said presently.

"A man don't ask to be born," pursued Scipio.

"Parents can't stop to think of that," I returned.

"H'm," mused Scipio. "Somebody or something has taken good care they'll never."

We continued along the trail, engrossed in our several thoughts, and I could hear Timberline, behind us with the pack horses, singing: —

> If that I was where I would be,
> Then should I be where I am not.

Our mode of travel had changed at Fort Washakie. There we had left the wagon and put ourselves and our baggage upon horses, because we should presently be in a country where wagons could not go. I suppose that more advice is offered and less taken than of any other free commodity in the world. Before I had settled where to go for sheep, nobody could tell me where to go; now almost every one advised some other than the place I had chosen. "Washakie Needles?" they would repeat unfavorably; "Union Peak's nearer;" or, "You go up Jakey's Fork;" or "Red Creek's half as far, and twice as many sheep;" or, "Last spring I seen a ram up Dinwiddie big as a horse."

This discouragement, strung along our road, had small weight with me because it was just the idle talk of those dingy loafers of the Western cabin and saloon who never hunted, never

did anything but sit still and assume to know your own business better than you knew it yourself; it was only once that the vigorous words of some by-passer on a horse caused Scipio and me to discuss dropping the Washakie Needles in favor of the country at the head of Green River. We were below Bull Lake at the forking of the ways; none of us had ever been in the Green River country, while Timberline evidently knew the Washakie Needles well, and this was what finally decided us. But Timberline had been thrown into the strangest agitation by our uncertainty. He had said nothing, but he walked about, coming near, going away, sitting down, getting up, instead of placidly watching his fire and cooking; until at last I told him not to worry, that wherever we went I should keep him and pay him in any case. Then he spoke: —

"I didn't hire to go to Green River."

"What have you got against Green River?"

"I hired to go to the Washakie Needles."

His agitation left him immediately upon our turning our faces in that direction. What had so disturbed him we could not guess; but later that day Scipio rode up to me, bursting with a solution. He had visited a freighter's camp, a

hundred yards off the road in the sage-brush (we were following the Embar trail), and the freighter, upon learning our destination, had said he supposed we were "after the reward." It did not get through my head at once, but when Scipio reminded me of the yellow poster and the murder, it got through fast enough: the body had been found on Owl Creek, and the middle fork of Owl Creek headed among the Washakie Needles. There might be another body, — the other Eastern man who had never been seen since, — and there was a possible third, the confederate, the cook; many held it was the murderer's best policy to destroy him as well.

Owl Creek had yielded no more bodies after that one first found. Perhaps the victims had been killed separately. Before starting on their last journey in this world, they had let it get out somewhere down on the railroad that they carried money; this was their awful mistake, conducting death to them in the shape of the man who had offered himself as their guide, and whom they had engaged without more knowledge of him than he disclosed to them himself. Red Dog was his name in Colorado, where he was "wanted." The all-day sitters and drinkers in

the cabins along the road had their omniscient word as to this also: *they* could have told those Easterners not to hire Red Dog!

So now we had Timberline accounted for satisfactorily to ourselves; he was "after the reward." We never said this to him, but we worked out his steps from the start. As stock-tender at Rongis he had seen that yellow poster pasted up, and had read it, day after day, with its promise of what to him was a fortune. To Owl Creek he could not go alone, having no money to buy a horse, and being afraid, too, perhaps. If he could only find that missing dead man—or the two of them—he might find a clew. My sheep hunt had dropped like a Providence into his hand.

We got across the hot country where rattlesnakes were thick where neither man lived nor water ran, and came to the first lone habitation in this new part of the world—a new set of mountains, a new set of creeks. A man stood at the door watching us come.

"Know him?" I asked Scipio.

"I've heard of him," said Scipio. "He married a squaw."

We were now opposite the man's door. "You folks after the reward?" said he.

"After mountain sheep," I replied, somewhat angry.

We camped some ten miles beyond him, and the next day crossed a low range, stopping near another cabin for noon. They gave us a quantity of berries they had picked, and we gave them some potatoes.

"After the reward?" said one of them as we rode away, and I contradicted him with temper.

"Lie to 'em," said Scipio. "Say yes." He developed his theory of truthfulness; it was not real falsehood to answer as you chose questions people had no right to ask; in fact, the only real lie was when you denied something wrong you had done. "And I've told hundreds of them, too," he concluded pensively.

Something had begun to weigh upon our cheerfulness in this new country. The reward dogged us, and we saw strange actions of people twice. We came upon some hot sulphur springs[1] and camped near them, with a wide stream between us and another camp. Those people — two men and two women — emerged from their tent, surveyed us, nodded to us, and

[1] To-day the flourishing resort Thermopolis, connected with both north and south by an important line of railway. In those days this lonely spot must have been two hundred miles from any railway.

settled down again. Next morning they had vanished; we could see the gleam of empty bottles on the bank opposite where they had been. And once, riding out of a little valley, we sighted close to us through cottonwoods a horseman leading a pack horse out of the next little valley.

He did not nod to us, but pursued his parallel course some three hundred yards off, until a rise in the ground hid him for a while; when this was passed he was no longer where he should have been, abreast of us, but far to the front, galloping away. That was our last sight of him. We spoke of these actions a little. Did these people suspect us, or were they afraid we suspected them?

All we ever knew was that suspicion had now gradually been wafted through the whole air and filled it like a coming change of weather. I could no longer look at a rock or a clump of trees without a disagreeable thought: was something, or somebody, behind the clump of trees and the rock? would they come out or wait until we had passed? This influence seemed to gather even more thick and chill as we turned up the middle fork of Owl Creek; magpies, that I had always liked to watch and listen to, had become part of

the general increasing uncomfortableness, and their cries sounded no longer cheerful, but harsh and unfriendly.

As we rode up the narrowing cañon of Owl Creek, the Washakie Needles, those twin spires of naked rock, rose into view high above the clustered mountain-tops, closing the cañon in, shutting out the setting sun. But the nearness of my goal and my sheep hunt brought me no elation. Those miserable questions about reward, the strange conduct of those unknown people, dwelt in my mind. I saw in memory the floating image of that poster; I wondered if I, in my clambering for sheep, should stumble upon signs — evidence — an old camp — ashes — tent-pegs — or the horrible objects that had come here alive and never gone hence. I could not drive these fancies from me amid the austere silence of the place where *it* had happened.

"He *can* talk when he wants to."

It made me start, this remark of Scipio's as he rode behind me.

"What has Timberline been telling you?"

"Nothing. But he's been telling himself a heap of something." In the rear of our single-file party Timberline rode, and I could hear him

rambling on in a rising and falling voice. He ceased once or twice while I listened, breaking out again as if there had been no interruption. It was a relief to have a practical trouble threatening us; if the boy was going off his head, we should have something real to deal with. But when I had chosen a camp and we were unsaddling and throwing the packs on the ground, Timberline was in his customary silence. After supper I walked off with Scipio where our horses were.

"Do you think he's sick?" I asked.

"I don't know," said Scipio. And that was all we said, for we liked the subject too little to pursue it.

Next morning I was over at the creek washing before breakfast. The sun was coming in through the open east end of our cañon, the shaking leaves of the quaking-asp twinkled in a blithe air, and a night's sleep had brought me back to a much robuster mood. I had my field-glasses with me, and far up, far up among patches of snow and green grass, I could see sheep on both sides of the valley.

"So you sleep well?" said Scipio.

"Like a log. You?"

"Like another. Somebody in camp didn't."

I turned and looked at Timberline cooking over at camp.

"Looking for the horses early this morning," pursued Scipio, "I found his tracks up and down all over everywheres."

"Perhaps he has found the reward."

Scipio laughed, and I laughed. It was the only thing to do. How much had the boy walked in the darkness?

"I think I'll take him with us," I then said. "I'd rather have him with us."

During breakfast we discussed which hill we should ascend, and, this decided on, I was about to tell Timberline his company was expected, when he saved me the trouble by requesting to be allowed to go himself. His usually pale, harmless eyes were full of some sort of glitter: did his fingers feel that they were about to clutch the reward?

That was the thirtieth of August; a quarter of a century and more has passed; my age is double what it was; but to-day, on any thirtieth of August, if I think of the date, the Washakie Needles stand in my eyes, — twin spires of naked rock, — and I see what happened there.

The three of us left camp. It was warm summer in the valley by the streaming channel of our creek, and the quiet day smelled of the pines. We should not have taken horses, they served us so little in such a climb as that. On the level top our legs and breathing got relief, and far away up the next valley were sheep. This second top we reached, but they were gone to the next beyond, where we saw them across a mile or so of space. In the bottom below us ran the north fork of Owl Creek like a fine white wire drawn through the distant green of the pines. Up in this world peaks and knife-edged ridges bristled to our north away and away beyond sight.

We now made a new descent and ascent, but had no luck, and by three o'clock we stood upon a lofty, wet, slipping ledge that fell away on three sides, sheer or broken, to the summer and the warmth that lay thousands of feet below. Here it began to be very cold, and to the west the sky now clotted into advancing lumps of thick thunder-cloud, black, weaving and merging heavily and swiftly in a fierce, rising wind. We got away from this promontory to follow a sheep trail, and as we went along the backbone of

the mountain, two or three valleys off to the right, long, black streamers let down from the cloud. They hung and wavered mistily close over the pines that did not grow within a thousand feet of our high level. I gazed at the streamers, and discerned water, or something, pouring down in them. Above our heads the day was still serene, and we had a chance to make camp without a wetting. This I suggested we should do, since the day's promise of sport had failed.

"No! no!" said Timberline, hoarsely. "See there! We can get them. We're above them. They don't see us!"

I saw no sheep where he pointed, but I saw him. His eyes looked red-hot. He insisted the sheep had merely moved behind a rock, and so we went on. The strip of clear sky narrowed, and gray bars of rain were falling between us and the pieces of woodland that, but a moment since, had been unblurred. Blasts of frozen wind rose about us, causing me to put on my rubber coat before my fingers should grow too numb to button it. We moved forward to a junction of the knife-ridges upon which a second storm was hastening from the southwest over deep valleys

that we turned our backs upon, and kept slowly urging our horses near the Great Washakie Needle.

We stopped at the base of its top pinnacle, glad to reach this slanting platform of comparative safety. No sheep were anywhere, but I had ceased to care about sheep. Jutting stones, all but their upturned points and edges buried in the ground, made this platform a rough place to pick one's way over — but this was a trifle. From these jutting points a humming sound now began to rise, a sort of droning, which at first ran about here and there among them, with a flickering, æolian capriciousness, then settled to a steady chord: the influence of the electric storm had encircled us. We all looked at each other, but turned immediately again to watch the portentous, sublime scene.

At the edge of our platform the world fell straight a thousand feet down to a valley like the bottom of a cauldron; on the far side of the cauldron the air, like a stroke of magic, became thick white, and through it leaped the first lightning, a blinding violet. An arm of the storm reached over to us, the cauldron sank from sight in a white sea, and the hail cut my face so

I bowed it down. Mixed with the hail fell softer flakes, which, as they touched the earth, glowed for a moment like tiny bulbs, and went out. On the ground I saw what looked like a tangle of old, human footprints in the hard-crusted mud. These the pellets of the swarming hail soon filled. This tempest of flying ice struck my body, my horse, raced over the ground like spray on the crest of breaking waves, and drove me to dismount and sit under the horse, huddled together even as he was huddled against the fury and the biting pain of the hail.

From under the horse's belly I looked out upon a chaos of shooting, hissing white, through which, in every direction, lightning flashed and leaped, while the fearful crashes behind the curtain of the hail sounded as if I should see a destroyed world when the curtain lifted. The place was so flooded with electricity that I gave up the shelter of my horse, and left my rifle on the ground and moved away from the vicinity of these points of attraction. Of my companions I had not thought; I now noticed them, crouching separately, much as I crouched.

So I sat — I know not how long — chilled from spine to brisket, my stiff boots growing

wet, my discarded gloves a pulp, like my hat, and melted hail trickling from the rubber coat to my legs. At length the hail-stones fell more gently, the near view opened, revealing white winter on all save the steep, gray Needles; the thick, white curtain of hail departed slowly; the hail where I was fell more scantily still.

It was slowly going away, — the great low-prowling cloud, — we should presently be left in peace unscathed, though it was at its tricks still. Its brimming, spilling-over electricity was now playing a new prank — mocking my ears with crackling noises, as of a camp-fire somewhere on earth, or in air. While I listened curiously to these, my eye fell on Timberline. He was turning, leaning, crouching, listening too. When he crouched, it was to peer at those old foot-prints I had noticed. There was something frightful in the sight of his face, shrunk to half its size, and I called to reassure him, and beckoned that it was all right, that we were all right. I doubt if he saw or heard me.

Something somewhere near my head set up a delicate sound. It seemed in my hat. I rose and began to wander, bewildered by this. The hail was now falling very fine and gentle, when sud-

denly I was aware of its stinging behind my ear more sharply than it had done at all. I turned my face in its direction and found its blows harmless, while the stinging in my ear grew sharper. The hissing continued close to my head whenever I walked. It resembled the little watery escape of gas from a charged bottle whose cork is being slowly drawn.

I was now more really disturbed than I had been during the storm's worst, and meeting Scipio, who was also wandering, I asked if he felt anything. He nodded uneasily, when, suddenly — I know not why — I snatched my hat off. The hissing was in the brim, and it died out as I looked at the leather binding and the stitches. I expected to see some insect there, or some visible reason for the noise. I saw nothing, but the pricking behind my ear had also stopped. Then I knew my wet hat had been charged like a Leyden jar with electricity. Scipio, who had watched me, jerked his hat off also.

"Lights on steer horns are nothing to this," I began, when a piercing scream cut me short.

Timberline, at the other side of the stony platform, had clapped his hands to his head.

"Take off your hat," I shouted.

But he had fallen on his knees, and was ripping, tearing his clothes. He plucked and dragged at the old rags next his skin. Then he flung his hands to the sky.

"O God!" he screamed. "Oh, Jesus! Keep him off me! Oh, save me!" His glaring face now seemed fixed on something close to him. "Leave me go! I didn't push you over. You know he made me push you. I meant nothing. I knowed nothing, I was only the cook. Why, I liked you — you was kind to me. Oh, why did I ever go! There! Take it back! There's your money! He give it to me when you was dead to make me hush up. There! I never spent a cent of it!"

He tore from his rags the hush-money that had been sewed in them, and scattered the fluttering bills in the air. Then once more he clapped his hands to his head as he kneeled.

"Take off your hat!" I cried again.

He rose, stared wildly, and screamed: "I tell you you've got it all. It's all he gave to me!"

The next moment he plunged into the cauldron, a thousand feet below.

On the following day we found the two bodies — that second victim the country had wondered

about, and the boy. And we counted the money, the guilty money that had for a while closed the boy's innocent mouth: five ten-dollar bills! Not much to hide murder for, not much to draw a tortured soul back to the scene of another's crime. The true murderer was not caught, and no one ever claimed the reward.

V

THE GIFT HORSE

High up the mountain amid white Winter I sat, and looked far down where still the yellow Autumn stayed, looked at Wind River shrunk to map-size, a basking valley, a drowsy country, tawny and warm, winding southeastward away to the tawny plain, and there dissolving with air and earth in one deep, hazy, golden sleep. Somewhere in that slumberous haze beyond the buttes and utmost foothills, and burrowed into the vast unfeatured level, lay my problem, Still Hunt Spring.

I had inquired much about Still Hunt Spring. Every man seemed to know of it, but no man you talked with had been to it. Description of it always came to me at second hand. Scipio I except; Scipio assured me he had once been to it. It was no easy spot to find; a man might pass it close and come back and pass it on the other side, yet never know it was at his elbow: so they said. The Indians believed a supernatural thing about it — that it was not there

every day, and few of them would talk readily about it; yet it was they who had first showed it to the white man. And because they repeated concerning a valley two hundred feet deep, a mile long, and a quarter-mile wide at its widest, this haunted legend of presence and absence, its name now possessed my mind. Like a strain of music it recurred to my thoughts each day of my November hunting in the mountains of Wind River. Still Hunt Spring; down there, somewhere in that drowsy distance, it lay. One trail alone led into it; from one end of the secret ravine to the other — they said — grew a single file of trees lank and tall as if they stood on stilts to see out over the top, and at the further end was a spring, small, cold, and sweet; though it welled up in the midst of sage-brush desert, there was no alkali — they said — in that water. Still Hunt Spring!

That night I announced to my two camp companions my new project: next summer I should see Still Hunt Spring for myself.

"Alone?" Scipio inquired.

"Not if you will come."

"It is no tenderfoot's trail."

"Then if I find it I shall cease to be a tenderfoot."

"Go on," said Scipio, with indulgence. "We'll not let you stay lost."

"It is no tenderfoot's place," the cook now muttered.

"Then you have been there?" I asked him.

He shook his head. "I am in this country for my health," he drawled. On this a certain look passed between my companions, and a certain laugh. A sudden suspicion came to me, which I kept to myself until next afternoon when we had broken this camp where no game save health seemed plentiful, and were down the mountains at Horse Creek and Wind River.

"I don't believe there is any such place as Still Hunt Spring."

This I said sitting with a company in the cabin known later on the Postal Route map as Dubois. The nearest post-office then was seventy-five miles away. No one spoke until a minute after, I suppose, when a man slowly remarked: "Some call that place Blind Spring."

He was presently followed by another, speaking equally slowly: "I've heard it called Arapaho Spring."

"Still Hunt Spring is right." This was a heavy, rosy-faced man, of hearty and capable

appearance. His clothes were strong and good, made of whipcord, but his maroon-colored straw hat so late in the season was the noticeable point in his dress. His voice was assertive, having in it something of authority, if not of menace. "Some claim there's such a place," he continued, eying me steadily and curiously, "and some claim there's not." (Here he made a pause.) "But I tell you there is."

He still held his eye upon me with no friendliness. Were they all merely playing on my tenderfoot credulity, or what was it? I was framing a retort when sounds of trouble came from outside.

"Man down in the corral," exclaimed somebody. "It's that wild horse."

Scipio met us, running. "No doctor here?" he panted. "McDonough has bruck his leg, looks like."

But the doctor was seventy-five miles away — like the post-office.

"Who's McDonough?" inquired the rosy-faced man with the straw hat.

A young fellow from Colorado, they told him, a new settler on Wind River this summer. He had taken up a ranch on North Fork and built him a cabin. Hard luck if he had broken his

leg; he had a bunch of horses; was going to raise horses; he had good horses. Hard luck!

We found young McDonough lying in the corral, propped against a neighbor's kindly knee. The wild horse was snorting and showing us red nostrils and white eyes in a far corner; he had reared and fallen backward while being roped, and the bars had prevented dodging in time. Dirt was ground into McDonough's flaxen hair, the skin was tight on his cheeks, and his lips were as white as his large, thick nails; but he smiled at us, and his strange blue eyes twinkled with the full spark of undaunted humor.

"Ain't I a son of a—?" he began, and shook his head over himself and his clumsiness. Further speech was stopped by violent retching, and I was enough of a doctor to fear that this augured a worse hurt than a broken leg. But no blood came up, and he was soon talking to us again, applying to himself sundry jocular epithets which were very well in that rough corral, but must stay there.

He was lifted to the only bed in the cabin, no sound escaping him, though his lips remained white, and when he thought himself unobserved he shut his eyes; but kept them open and twin-

kling at any one's approach. They were strange, perplexed eyes, evidently large, but deep-set, their lids screwed together; later that evening I noticed that he held his playing-cards close to them, and slightly to one side. Scipio called him "skew-bald," but I could see no such defect. He was not injured internally, it proved later, but his right leg was broken above the ankle. We had to cut his boot off, so swollen already was the limb. The heavy man with the straw hat advised getting him to the hospital at the post without delay, and regretted he himself had not come up the river in his wagon; he could have given the patient a lift. With this he departed upon a tall roan horse, with an air about him of business and dispatch uncommon in these parts. Wind River horsemen mostly looked and acted as if there was no such thing as being behind time, there being no such thing as time.

"Who is he?" I asked, looking after the broad back of whipcord and the unseasonable straw hat.

All were surprised. What? Not know Lem Speed? Biggest cattleman in the country. Store and a bank in Lander. House in Salt Lake. Wife in Los Angeles. Son at Yale.

"Up here looking after his interests?" I pursued.

"Up here looking after his interests." My exact words were repeated in that particular tone which showed I was again left out of something.

"What's the matter with my questions?" I asked.

"What's the matter with our answers?" said a man. Truly, mine had been a tenderfoot speech, and I sat silent.

McDonough's white lips regained no color that night, and the skin drew tighter over the bones of his face as the hours wore on. He was proof against complaining, but no stoic endurance could hide such pain as he was in. Beneath the sunburn on his thick hand the flesh was blanched, yet never did he once ask if the hay wagon was not come for him. They had expected to get him off in it by seven, but it did not arrive until ten minutes before midnight; they had found it fifteen miles up the river, instead of two. Sitting up, twisted uncomfortably, he played cards until one of the company, with that lovable tact of the frontier, took the cards from him, remarking, "You'll lose all you've got," and, with his consent, played his hand and made bets for him.

McDonough then sank flat, watching the game with his perplexed, half-shut eyes.

What I could do for him I did; it was but little. Finding his leg burning and his hand cold, I got my brandy — their whiskey was too doubtful — and laid wet rags on the leg, keeping them wet. He accepted my offices and my brandy without a sign; this was like most of them, and did not mean that he was not grateful, but only that he knew no way to say so. Laudanum alone among my few drugs seemed applicable, and he took twenty drops with dumb acquiescence, but it brought him neither sleep nor doze. More I was afraid in my ignorance to give him, and so he bore, unpalliated, what must have become well-nigh agony by midnight, when we lifted him into the wagon. So useless had I been, and his screwed-up eyes, with their valiant sparkle, and his stoic restraint, made me feel so sorry for him, that while they were making his travelling bed as soft as they could I scrawled a message to the army surgeon at the Post. "Do everything you can for him," I wrote, "and as I doubt if he has five dollars to his name, hold me responsible." This I gave McDonough without telling him its contents. Off they drove him in the cold, mute

night; I could hear the heavy jolts of the wagon a long way. Six rocky fords lay between here and Washakie, and Scipio thus summed up the seventy-five miles the patient had before him: "I don't expect he'll improve any on the road."

In new camps among other mountains I now tried my luck through deeper snow, thicker ice, and colder days, coming out at length lean and limber, and ravenous for every good that flesh is heir to, yet reluctant to turn eastward to that city life which would unfailingly tarnish the bright, hard steel of health. Of Still Hunt Spring I spoke no more, but thought often, and with undiscouraged plans to visit it. I mentioned it but once again. Old Washakie, chief of the Shoshone tribe, did me the honor to dine with me at the military post which bore his name. Words cannot describe the face and presence of that old man; ragged clothes abated nothing of his dignity. A past like the world's beginning looked from his eyes; his jaw and long white hair made you silent as tall mountains make you silent. After we had dined and I had made him presents, he drew pictures in the sand for me with his finger. Not as I expected, almost to my

disappointment, this Indian betrayed no mystery concerning the object of my quest.

"Hé!" he said (it was like a shrug). "No hard find. You want see him? Water pretty good, yes. Trees heap big. You make ranch maybe?"

When he heard my desire was merely to see Still Hunt Spring, I am not certain he understood me, or if so, believed me. "Hé!" he exclaimed again, and laughed because I laughed. "You go this way," he said, beginning to trace a groove in the sand. "So." He laid a match here and there and pinched up little hillocks, and presently he had it all set forth. I tore off a piece of wrapping-paper from the stove and copied the map carefully, with his comments. The place was less distant than I had thought. I thanked him, spoke of returning "after one snow" to see him and Still Hunt Spring. "Hé!" he shrugged. Then he mounted his pony, and rode off without any "good-by," Indian fashion. I counted it a treasure I had got from him.

McDonough's leg had knit well, and I met him on crutches crossing the parade ground. He was discharged from hospital, and (I will not deny it) his mere nod of greeting seemed somewhat too scant acknowledgment of the good will

I had certainly tried to show him. Yet his smile was very pleasant, and while I noted his face, no longer embrowned with sun and riding, but pale from confinement, I noted also the unsubdued twinkle in his perplexed eyes. After all, why should I need thanks? As he hobbled away with his yellow hair sticking out in a cowlick under his hat behind, I smiled at my own smallness, and wished him good luck heartily.

The doctor, whose hospitable acquaintance I had made on first coming through the Post this year, would not listen to my paying him anything for his services to McDonough. Army surgeons were expected, he said, to render what aid they could to civilians, as well as to soldiers, in the hospital; he good-humoredly forbade all the remonstrance I attempted. When civilians could pay him themselves, he let them do so according to their means; it was just as well that the surrounding country should not grow accustomed to treating "Uncle Sam" as a purely charitable institution. McDonough had offered to pay, when he could, what he could afford. The doctor had thought it due to me to let him know the contents of my note, and that no such arrangement could be allowed.

"And what said he to that?" I asked.

"Nothing, as usual."

"Disgusted, perhaps?"

"Not in the least. His myopic eyes were just as cheerful then as they were the second before he fainted away under my surgical attentions. He scorned ether."

"Poor fellow! He's a good fellow!" I exclaimed.

"M'm," went the doctor, doubtfully.

"Know anything against him?" I asked.

"Know his kind. All the way from Assiniboine to Lowell Barracks."

"It has made you hard to please," I declared.

"M'm," went the doctor again.

"Think he'll not pay you?"

"May. May not."

"Well, good-by, Cynic."

"Good-by, Tenderfoot."

The next morning, had there been time to catch the doctor, I could have proved to him that he was hard to please. At the moment of my stepping into the early stage I had a surprise. McDonough had been at breakfast at the hotel, and had said nothing to me; a nod sufficed him, as usual — it was as much social intercourse as

The stage rattled up as I sat

was customary at breakfast, or, indeed, at any of the meals. The stage rattled up as I sat, and I, its only passenger, rose and spoke a farewell syllable to McDonough, who repeated his curt nod. My next few minutes were spent in paying the bill, seeing my baggage roped on behind the stage, and in bidding Scipio good-by. One foot was up to get into the vehicle when a voice behind said, "So you're going."

There was McDonough, hobbled out after me to the fence. He stood awkwardly at the open gate, smiling his pleasant smile. I replied yes, and still he stood.

"Coming next year?"

Again I said yes, and again he stood silent, smiling and awkward. Then it was uttered; the difficult word which shyness had choked: "If you come, you shall have the best horse on the river."

Before I could answer he was hobbling back to the hotel. Thus from his heart his untrained lips at last had spoken.

I drove away, triumphing over the doctor, and in my thoughts my holiday passed in review,—my camps, and Scipio, and Still Hunt Spring, and most of all this fellow with his broken leg and perplexed eyes.

At Lander, they said, had I come two days earlier, I should have had the company of Lem Speed. So he and his maroon straw hat came into my thoughts too. He had started for California, I heard from the driver, whose society I sought on the box. He assured me that Lem Speed was rich, but that I carried better whiskey. Trouble was "due" in this country, he said (after more of my whiskey), "pretty near" the sort of trouble they were having on Powder River. For his part he did not wonder that poor men got tired of rich men; not that he objected to riches, but only to hogs. He had nothing against Lem Speed. Temptation to steal stock had never come his way, but he could understand how poor men might get tired of the big cattlemen — some poor men, anyhow. Yes, trouble was "sure due"; what brought Lem Speed up here so long after the beef round-up? Still, he "guessed" he hadn't told Lem Speed anything that would hurt a poor fellow. Lem Speed had "claimed" he was up here about his bank. If so, why had he gone up Wind River, and all around Big Muddy, and over to the Embar? The bank was not there. No, sir; the big cattlemen were going to "demonstrate" over here as they had on the Dry

Cheyenne and Box Elder. I perceived "demonstration" to be the driver's word for the sudden hanging of somebody without due process of law, and I expressed a doubt as to its being needed here; I had heard nothing of cattle or horses being stolen. This he received in silence, presently repeating that Lem Speed hadn't got anything from *him*. We broke off this subject for mines, and after mines we touched on topic after topic, until I confided to him the story of McDonough.

"Of course I would never accept the horse," I finished.

"Why not?"

"Well — well — it would hardly be suitable."

"Please yourself," said the driver, curtly, and looking away. "Such treatment would not please me."

"You mean, 'never look a gift horse in the mouth,' as we say?"

"I don't know as I ever said that." A steep gulley in the road obliged him to put on the break and release it before he continued: "I'd not consider I had the right to do a man a good turn if I wasn't willing for him to do *me* one."

"But I really did nothing for him."

"Please yourself. Maybe folks are different East."

"Well," I ended, laughing, "I understand you, and am not the hopeless snob I sound like, and I'll take his horse next summer if you will take a drink now."

We finished our journey in amity.

The intervening months, whatever drafts they made upon my Rocky Mountain health, weakened my designs not a whit; late June found me again in the stagecoach, taking with eagerness that drive of thirty-two jolting hours. Roped behind were my camp belongings, and treasured in my pocket was Chief Washakie's trail to Still Hunt Spring. My friend, the driver, was on the down stage; and so, to my regret, we could not resume our talk where we had left it; but I again encountered at once that atmosphere of hinted doings and misdoings which had encompassed me as I went out of the country. At the station called Crook's Gap I came upon new rumors of Lem Speed, and asked, had he come about his bank again?

"You and him acquainted?" inquired a man on a horse. And, on my answering that I was not, he cursed Lem Speed slow and long, looking

about for contradiction; then, as none present took it up, he rode sullenly away, leaving silence behind him.

When I alighted next afternoon at the Washakie post-trader's store and walked back to the private office of the building whither I was wont always to repair, what I saw in that private room, through a sort of lattice which screened it off from the general public, was a close-drawn knot of men round a table, and on a chair a maroon-colored straw hat! Rather hastily the post-trader came out, and, shaking my hand warmly, drew me away from the lattice. After a few cordial questions he said: "Come back this evening."

"Does he never get a new hat?" I asked.

"Hat? Who? What? Oh; yes, to be sure!" laughed the post-trader. "I'll tell him he ought to."

I sought out the doctor, soon learning from him that McDonough had paid him for his services. But this had not softened his opinion of the young fellow, though he had heard nothing against him, nor even any mention of his name; he repeated his formula that he had known McDonough's kind all the way from Assiniboine to Lowell Barracks, whereupon I again called

him "cynic," and he retorted with "tenderfoot," and thus amicably I left him for my postponed gossip with the post-trader. Him I found hospitable, but preoccupied, holding a long cigar unlighted between his taciturn lips. Each topic that I started soon died away: my Eastern news; my summer plans to ramble with Scipio across the Divide on Gros Ventre and Snake; the proposed extension of the Yellowstone Park — everything failed.

"That was quite a company you had this afternoon," I said, reaching the end of my resources.

"Yes. Nice gentlemen. Yes." And he rolled the long, unlighted cigar between his lips.

"Cattlemen, I suppose?"

"Cattlemen. Yes."

"Business all right, I hope?"

"Well, no worse than usual."

Here again we came to an end, and I rose to go.

"Seen your friend McDonough yet?" said he, still sitting.

"Why, how do you know he's a friend of mine?"

"Says so every time he comes into the Post."

"Well, the doctor's all wrong about him!" I

exclaimed, and gave my views. The post-trader watched me in his tilted chair, with a half-whimsical smile, rolling his eternal cigar, and I finished with the story of the horse. Then the smile left his face. He got up slowly, and slowly took a number of turns round his office, pottered with some papers on his desk, and finally looked at me again.

"Tell me if he does," he said.

"Offer the horse? I shall not remind him — and I should take it only as a loan."

"You tell me if he does," repeated the post-trader, now smiling again, and so we parted.

"I wonder what he didn't say?" I thought as I proceeded to the hotel; for he had plainly pondered some remarks and decided upon silence. Between them, he and the doctor had driven me to a strong hope that McDonough would vindicate my opinion of him by making good his word. At breakfast next morning at the hotel one of the invariable characters at such breakfasts, an unshaven person in tattered overalls, with rope-scarred fists and grimy knuckles, to me unknown, asked: —

"Figure on meeting your friend McDonough?"

"Not if he doesn't figure on meeting me."

They all took quiet turns at looking at me until some one remarked: —

"He ain't been in town lately."

"I'm glad his leg's all right," I said.

"Oh, his leg's all right."

The tone of this caused me to look at them. "Well, I hope he's *all* all-right!"

Not immediately came the answer: "By latest reports he was enjoying good health."

Truly they were a hopeless people to get anything direct from. Indirectness is by some falsely supposed to be a property of only the highly civilized; but these latter merely put a brighter and harder polish on it.

That afternoon I drove with my camp things out of town in a "buggy," — very different from the Eastern vehicle which bears this name, — and the next afternoon between Dinwiddie and Red Creek, on a waste stretch high above the river, who should join me but McDonough. He was riding down the mountain apparently from nowhere, and my pleasure at seeing him was keen. His words were few and halting, as they had been the year before, and in his pleasant, round face the blue eyes twinkled, screwed up and as perplexed as ever. I abstained from more than

glancing at the fine sorrel that he rode, lest I should seem to be hinting.

"Water pretty low for this season," he said.

"Was there not much snow?"

"Next to none, and went early."

I turned from my direct course and camped at his cabin on North Fork.

"What's your hurry?" he said next morning, when I was preparing to go.

There was no hurry; those days had no hurry in them, and I bless their memory for it. I sat on a stump, smoking a "Missouri meerschaum," and unfolding to him my plans. To the geography of my route he listened intently — very intently.

"So you're going to keep over the other side the mountains?" he said.

"Even to Idaho," I answered, "and home that way."

"Not back this way?"

"Not this year."

He thought a little while. "You're settled as to that?"

"Quite."

He rose, and put some wood into the stove in his cabin; then he returned to me where I sat on

the stump. "Sure you're quite settled you'll keep on the west side of the Divide?"

"Goodness!" I laughed, "why should I lie to you?"

Again he pondered in silence, and I could not imagine what he had in his mind. What had my being east or being west of the mountains to do with him?

He now jerked his head toward the corral. "Like him?" he inquired gruffly. It was the sorrel horse that he meant, and I perceived that it was standing saddled. I said nothing. The fellow's embarrassment embarrassed me. "Like him?" he repeated.

"Looks good to me," I replied, adopting his gruffness.

He rose and brought the horse to me. "Get on."

"Hulloa! You've got my saddle on him."

"Get on. He ain't the one that bruck my leg."

I obeyed. Thus was the gift offered and accepted. I rode the horse down and up the level river bottom. "How shall I get him back to you?" I asked.

McDonough's face fell. "He'll be all right in the East," he protested.

I smiled. "No, my good friend. Not that. Let me send him back with the outfit."

We compromised on this, and caught trout for the rest of the day, also shooting some young sage chickens. The sorrel proved a fine animal. Again McDonough delayed my departure. "I can broil those chickens fine," he said, "and — and you'll not be back this way."

He would not look at me as he said this, but busied himself with the fire. He was lonely, and liked my company, and couldn't say so. Dense doctor! I reflected, not to have been warmed by this nature. But later this friendless fellow touched my heart more acutely. A fine thought had come to me during the evening: to leave my wagon here, to leave a note for Scipio at the E-A outfit, to descend Wind River to the Sand Gulch, strike Washakie's trail to the northeast of Crow Heart Butte, and on my vigorous sorrel find Still Hunt Spring by myself. The whole ride need take but two days. I think I must have swelled with pride at the prospect of this secret achievement, to be divulged, when accomplished, to the admiring dwellers on Wind River. But I intended to have the pleasure of divulging it to McDonough at once, and I

forthwith composed a jeering note to Scipio Le Moyne.

"Esteemed friend" (this would anger him immediately); "come and find me at Still Hunt Spring, if you don't fear getting lost. If you do, avoid the risk, and I will tell you all about it Friday evening. Yours, Tenderfoot."

I pushed this over to McDonough, who was practising various cuts with a pack of cards. "That will make Scipio jump," I said.

Somewhat to my disappointment, it did not have this or any effect upon McDonough. He held the paper close to his eyes, shutting them still more to follow the writing, and handed it back to me, saying merely, "Pretty good."

"I'll leave it over at the E-A for him," I explained. "He thinks I'm afraid to go there alone."

"Yes. Pretty good," said McDonough, as if I were venturing nothing. Was all Wind River going to treat it as such a trifle? Or — could it be that McDonough alone among white men and red hereabouts knew nothing of the mystery and menace by which Still Hunt Spring was encircled?

Next morning my perplexity was cleared. I made an early start, tying some food and a kettle

and my "slicker" to the saddle. McDonough watched me curiously.

"Leavin' your wagon and truck?" he inquired.

"Why, yes, of course. I'll be back for it. I'm going to the E-A now. Are you a poet?" I continued. "I've begun a thing." And I handed him some unfinished lines, which I had entitled "At Gift Horse Ranch." "You don't object to that?"

"Object to what?"

"Why, the title, 'At Gift Horse Ranch.'"

He took the paper down from his eyes, and I saw that his face had suddenly turned scarlet. He stood blinking for a moment, and then he said: —

"I'd kind of like to hear it."

"But that's all there is to hear — so far!" I exclaimed, feeling somehow puzzled.

He put the verses close to his eyes once more. Then he held them out to me, and stood blinking in his odd, characteristic way. "Won't y'u read 'em to me?" he at length managed to say. "I'll not fool *you*."

For yet one moment more I was dull, and did not understand.

"I can't read," he stated simply.

"Oh!" I murmured in mortification. And so I read the lines to him.

He stretched out his hand for the scribbled envelope on which I had pencilled the fragment. "May I keep that?"

"Wait till I have it finished."

"I'd kind of like to have the start to keep." He took it and shoved it awkwardly inside his coat. "I can't read or write," he said, more at his ease now the truth was out. "Nobody ever taught me nothin'."

But I was not at ease. "Well, that stuff of mine is not worth reading!" I said. Cards had a meaning for him — kings, queens, ten-spots — these had been the fellow's only books! He went on, "Never had any folks, y'u see — to know 'em, that is. — Well, so-long till you're back." He turned to his cabin, and I touched my horse.

The sorrel had gone but a few steps when I looked over my shoulder, and there stood the solitary figure, watching me from the cabin door. Suddenly it occurred to me that, as he had not been able to read my letter to Scipio, he knew nothing of my project. *This* was why he had manifested no surprise! "Do you think," I

called back, laughing, "that your horse can take me to Still Hunt Spring?"

I am now sure that a flash of some totally different expression crossed his face, but at the time I was not sure; he was instantly smiling. "Take y'u anywhere," he called. "Take y'u to Mexico, take y'u to Hell!"

"Oh, not yet!" I responded, and cantered away. So he thought I would not dare to go alone to Still Hunt Spring! Well and good; they should all believe it by Friday evening.

My cantering ceased soon, — it had been for dramatic effect, — and as I had before me a long ride, it behooved me to walk the first miles. Yet I was soon up the easy ascent from North Fork, and though my descent to the main river from the dividing ridge was through precipitous red bluffs, and accomplished with caution, I reached the E-A ranch (where it used to be twenty-five years ago) in less than two hours. To leave my note there for Scipio took but a minute, and now on the level trail down Wind River I made good time, so that before ten o'clock I had crossed back over it above the Blue Holes, skirted by where the Circle fence is to-day, crossed North Fork here, gone up a gulch, and dropped down

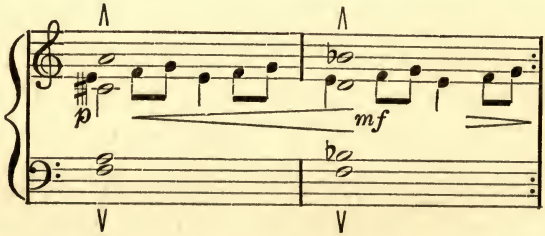
again upon Wind River below its abrupt bend, and reached the desolate Sand Gulch. I nooned at the spring which lies, no bigger than a hat, about seven miles up the Sand Gulch on its north side. This was the starting-point of the trail that old Washakie had drawn for me; here I crossed the threshold of the mysterious and the untrodden.

The sense of this heightened the elation which my ride through the bracing hours of dawn had brought me, and as I turned out of the Sand Gulch it was as if some last tie of restraint had stepped from my spirit, leaving it on wings free and rejoicing. This gleamy, unfooted country always looked monotonous from the bluffs of Wind River, but I found no tedium in it; its delicious loneliness was thrilled at each new stage of the trail by recognizing the successive signs and landmarks which Washakie had bidden me look for. The first was a great dull red stone, carved rudely by some ancient savage hand to represent a tortoise. Perhaps in another mood, the grim appearance of this monster might have seemed a symbol of menace, but when I came upon the stone just where my map indicated that it was to be expected, I hailed it with triumph.

Nor did the caked and naked earth of the region through which I next traced my way dry up my ardor. Gullies sometimes hid all views from me, and again from mounds and rises I could see for fifty miles. Should this ever meet the eye of some reader familiar with Wind River, he will know my whereabouts by learning that far off, but constantly in plain sight to my left, were Black Mountain and Spring Mountain; that I must have been headed toward a point about midway between where the mail camp now is and the pass over to Embar; that I crossed Crow Creek and (I think) Dry Creek, and that I saw both Steamboat Butte and Tea Pot Butte at different points. Even to write these names is a pleasure, for I loved that country so; and sometimes it seems as if I must go there and smell the sage-brush again — or die!

After the tortoise came several guiding signs: a big gash in the soil, cut by a cloud-burst; an old corral where I turned sharp to the left; a pile of white buffalo bones five miles onward; until at length I passed through a belt of low hills, bare and baked and colored, some pink, like tooth-powder, and others magenta, and entered a more level region covered with sparse grass and sage-

brush. Great white patches of alkali, acres in extent, lay upon this plain. There was no water (Washakie had told me there would be none), and the gleamy waste stretched away on all sides; endlessly in front, and right and left to long lines of distant mountains, full of light and silence. Let the reader who is susceptible to tone combinations listen to the following dissonant, unresolved measures, played slowly over and over: —



their brooding harmonies will picture or at least convey that landscape better than any words. I think it was really a mournful landscape, grand and grave with suggestion of ages unknown, of eras when the sea was not where it is now, and animals never seen by man wandered over the half-made world. Earth did not seem one's own here, but alien, but aloof, as if, through some sudden translation, one had lit upon another planet, perhaps a dying one. Yet during these hours of nearing my goal no such melancholy fancies over-

took me; I rode forward like some explorer, and I tried to complete the verses which I had begun at McDonough's: —

> Would I might prison in these words,
> And so keep with me all the year
> Some inch of this bright wilderness
> Of freedom that I move in here.

But nothing resulted from it, unless a surprisingly swift flight of time. I was aware all at once that day was gone, that the rose and saffron heavens would soon be a field of stars. I had matched one by one the signs on my map with the realities around me, and now had reached the map's last word; I was to stop when I found myself on a line between a hollow dip in the mountains to the left and a circular patch of forest high up on those to the right. On this line I was to travel to the right "a little way," said Washakie. This I began to do, wondering if the twilight would last, and for the first time anxious. After "a little way" I found nothing new — the plain, the sage-brush, the dry ground — no more; and again a little further it was the same, while the twilight was sinking, and disquiet grew within me. Lost I could not well be, but I could fail; food would give out, and before this the sorrel

and I must retrace our way to water at the Sand Gulch, seven hours behind us. The twilight deepened. Had I passed it? Should I ride in a circle? Rueful thoughts of a "dry camp" began to assert themselves, and my demoralized hand grew doubtful on the reins, when I gradually discovered that the sorrel *knew where he was.* There was no mistaking the increasing alertness that passed through him.

As this extraordinary fact became a certainty the chasm opened at my feet; the sorrel was trotting quickly along the brink of Still Hunt Spring! In broad day I should have seen it a moment sooner, and the suddenness with which, in the semi-obscurity, it had leaped into my view close beside me produced a startling effect. The success of my quest did not bring the unmixed pleasure that I had looked for; the dying day, the desolate shapes of the hills, the unbefriending hush of the plain, the odd alertness of the sorrel — all this for a while flavored my triumph with something akin to apprehension, and it seemed as if the ravine beneath me had been lurking in a sort of ambush until I should be fully within its power. The Indian legend was now easy to account for; indeed, I have met often enough,

among our unlettered and rustic white population, with minds that would have believed, after such a shock as I had just received, that they had beheld the earth open supernaturally. The sorrel's trot had become a canter as we continued to skirt the brink. Looking down I discovered in shadowy form the line of tall cottonwoods, spindled from their usual shape to the gaunt figures described as being on stilts; then the horse turned into the entrance. This steep and narrow trail was barred at a suitable place by a barrier of brush, which I replaced after passing it. A haunting uneasiness caused me to regret that I had not arrived in full daylight, but this I presently overcame. Before we reached the bottom I saw a number of horses grazing down among the trees, and they set up a great running about and kicking their heels at the sight of a human visitor. There must have been twenty or thirty.

Lassitude and satisfaction now divided my sensations as I made my way to the spring, whose cool, sweet water fulfilled all expectation. My good map served me to the last; with it I lighted my cooking fire, addressing it aloud as I did so, "Burn! your work is done!" I needed no map to go back! I had mastered the trail! In my

recovered spirits I quite forgot how much I owed to the sorrel. While picking up dry sticks I stumbled upon what turned out to be a number of branding irons, which were quite consistent with the presence of the horses and the barrier at the entrance. Evidently the place sometimes served as a natural pasture and corral for stock gathered on the round-up and far strayed from where they belonged. Perhaps some one was camping here now. I shouted several times; but my unanswered voice merely made the silence more profound, and for a while the influence of the magic legend returned. With this my fancy played not unpleasingly while the kettle — or rather the coffee-pot — was boiling. The naturalness of building a fire, of making camp, of preparing a meal, helped common sense to drive out and keep out those featureless fears which had assailed me. What stories could be made about this place by a skilful writer! The lost traveller stumbles upon it, enters, suspects himself to be not alone, calls out, and immediately the haunted walls close and he is shut within the bowels of the earth. How release him? Therein would be the story. Or — the lost traveller, well-nigh dead of thirst, hastens to the spring amid the

frolicsome gambols of the horses. No sooner has he drunk than he becomes a horse himself, and the others neigh loud greetings to a brother victim. Then a giant red man appears and brands him. How release all the horses from the spell?

As I lay by my little cooking fire in the warm night, after some bacon and several cups of good tea made in the coffee-pot, I was too contented to do aught in the way of exploration, and I continued to recline, hearing no sound but the grazing horses, and seeing nothing but the nearer trees, the dark sides of the valley, and the open piece of sky with its stars. My saddle-blanket and "slicker" served me for what bed I needed, the saddle with my coat supplied a pillow, and the cups of tea could not keep me from immediate and deep slumber.

I opened my eyes in sunlight, and the first object that they rested upon was a maroon-colored straw hat. With the mental confusion that frequently attends a traveller upon first waking in a new place, I lay considering the hat and wondering where I was, until at a sound I turned to see the hat's owner stooping to the spring. Instantly Lem Speed, cattleman and owner of a

store and bank in Lander, a house in Salt Lake, a wife in Los Angeles, and a son at Yale, was covering me with a rifle.

"Stay still," was his remark.

Not a suspicion that it was anything but a joke entered my head. I lay there and I smiled. "I could not hurt you if I wished to."

"You will never hurt me any more."

Another voice then added: "He is not going to hurt any of us any more."

"Stay still!" sharply reiterated Lem Speed, for at the second voice I had half risen.

"For whom do you take me?" I asked.

"For one of the people we want."

I continued to be amused. "I'll be glad to know what you want me for. I'll be glad to know what damage I've done. I'll be happy to make it good. I came over here last night for—"

"Go on. What did you come for?"

"Nothing. Simply to see this place. I've wanted to see it for a year. I wanted to see if I could find it by myself." And I told them who I was and where I lived.

"That's a good one, ain't it?" said a third man to Lem Speed.

"And so," said he, "you, claiming you're an

Eastern tenderfoot, found this place, first trip, all by yourself across fifty miles of country old-timers get lost in?"

"No. Washakie gave me a map."

"Let's see your map."

"I lighted my fire with it."

Somebody laughed. There were now five or six of them standing round me.

"If some of you gentlemen will condescend to tell me what you think my name is, and what you think I have done—"

"We don't know what your name is, and we don't care. As to what you've done, that's as well known to you as it is to us, and you've got gall to ask, when we've caught you right on the spot, branding-irons and all."

"Well, I'm beginning to understand. You think you've caught a cattle thief."

"Horse thief," corrected one.

"Both, probably," added another.

"I'll not ask you to believe me any more," I now said. "Don't I see the post-trader over there among those horses?"

"No."

"Very well, take me to him at Washakie. He has known me for years. I demand it."

"We'll not take you anywhere. We're going to leave you here."

And now the truth, the appalling, incredible truth, which my brain had totally failed to take in, burst like a blast of heat or ice over my whole being, penetrating the innermost recesses of my soul with a blinding glare. They intended to put me to death at once; their minds were as stone vaults closed against all explanation. Here in this hidden crack of the wilderness my body would be left hanging, and far away my family and friends would never know by what hideous outrage I had perished. Slowly they would become anxious at getting no news of me; there would be an inquiry, a mystery, then sorrow, and finally acceptance of my unknown fate. Broken visions of home, incongruous minglings of loved faces and commonplace objects, like my room with its table and chairs, rushed upon me. Had I not been seated, I must have fallen at the first shock of this stroke. They stood watching me.

"But," I began, feeling that my very appearance was telling against me, while my own voice sounded guilty to my ears, "but it's not true."

"What's the use in him talking any more to us?" said a man to Lem Speed.

Lem Speed addressed me. "You claim this: you're an Eastern traveller. You come here — out of curiosity. You risk getting lost in the hardest country around here — out of curiosity. But you come all straight because an Indian's map guides you, only you've burnt it. And you're a stranger, ignorant that this is a *cache* for rustlers. That's what you claim. It don't sound like much against these facts: last year you and another man that's wanted in several places and that we're after now — you and him was known to be thick. You offered to pay his doctor's bill. You come back to the country where he's been operating right along, and first thing you do you come over to this *cache* when he's got stolen horses right in it, and you ride a stolen horse that's known to have been in his possession, and that's got on it now the brand of the outfit this gentleman here represents — all out of curiosity."

"We've just found six more of our stock in here," said the gentleman indicated by Speed.

I repeated my story in a raised voice — I had not yet had time to regain composure. I accounted for each of my movements from the beginning until now, vehemently reassert-

ing my ignorance and innocence. But I saw that they were not even attending to me any longer; they looked at me only now and then, they spoke low to each other, pointing to the other end of the valley, and turned, while I was still talking, to receive the report of another man, who came from among the stolen horses.

Then I fell silent. I sat by my saddle, locking my hands round my knees, and turning my eyes first upon the men, and then upon the whole place. A strange crystal desolation descended upon me, quiet and cold. The early sunlight showed every object in an extraordinary and delicate distinctness; the stones high up the sides of the valley, the separate leaves on the small high branches of the cottonwoods; the interstices on the bark on lower trunks some distance away; the fine sand and grass of the valley's level bottom, with little wild rose bushes here and there; all these things I noticed, and more, and then my eyes came back to my little dead fire, and the blackened coffee-pot in which I had made the tea. "Your friend McDonough," they had said to me at Washakie, and I had wondered what was behind their reticence when I inquired about him.

They were always ready, I bitterly reflected, to feed lies to a tenderfoot, but a syllable of truth about McDonough's suspected dishonesty, which would have saved me from this, they were unwilling to speak. It was natural, of course; everything was natural. I saw also why McDonough had been so precise in asking which way I expected to travel. Over on Snake River, and in Idaho, the sorrel was in no danger of identification, and therefore I should be safe. But even with the whole chain of evidence: the doctor's bill, the corral, my unlucky tale of a map which I could not prove, and the branding-irons with which they believed I was going to alter the legitimate brands — what right had they to deny me the chance I asked?

The last two of them now came from the horses to make their report: "Five brands. Thirty-two head. N lazy Y, Bar Circle Zee, Goose Egg, Pitch Fork, Seventy-Six, and V R."

"Not one of you," I broke out, "knows a word against me, except some appearances which the post-trader will set right in one minute. I demand to be taken to him."

"Ain't we better be getting along, Lem?" said one.

"Most eight o'clock," said another, looking at his watch.

"Stand up," said Lem Speed.

Upon being thus ordered, like a felon, my utterance was suddenly choked, and it was with difficulty that I mastered the tears which welled hotly to my eyes.

"Any message you want to write —"

"No!" I shouted.

"Then let's be getting along," said the first man.

"Any message I wrote you would not deliver; it would put a rope round your neck, too. And, Mr. Lem Speed, with your store, and bank, and house, and wife, and son, I hope you will live to see them come to ruin and disgrace."

I wish that I had never spoken these weak, discreditable words; but he who has not been tested cannot know the bitterness of such a test as this.

A horse was led to me, and I got on without aid, a man on each side of me. Memory after this records nothing. We must have been some time — I think we walked — in reaching the other end of the valley, yet I cannot recall what was spoken around me, or whether or not anything

was spoken; I can recall only the sides of the valley passing, and the warmer sense of the sun on my shoulders, and the vivid scent of the sage-brush. What firmness or lack of firmness I might have displayed at the very end I can never know. Before we halted at the fatal tree of execution, and while my rage was still sustaining me, a noise of rattling stones caused us all to look upward, and there, galloping down the steep trail, wildly waving and shouting to us, was Scipio Le Moyne. It reeled through me! I was saved!

He plunged into the midst of us at breakneck speed, drew up so short that his horse slid, and burst out furiously — not to my captors, but to me. "You need a nurse!" he cried hoarsely. "Any travelling you do should be in a baby coach."

Breath failed him, he sat in his saddle, bowed over and panting, hands shaking, face dripping with sweat, shirt drenched, as was his trembling horse. After a minute he looked at Speed. "So I'm in time, my God! I've ridden all night. I'd have been here an hour sooner only I forgot about the turn at the corral. Here. That's the way I knowed it."

He handed over my letter, left for him at the

E-A ranch. This, with a few words from him, cleared me. All that I had declared was verified; they saw what they had been about to do.

"Well, now, well!" exclaimed one, grinning.

"To think of us getting fooled that way!" another remarked, grinning.

"But it's all right now," said a third, grinning.

"That's so!" a fourth agreed. "No harm done. But we had a close shave, didn't we?" And he grinned too.

Lem Speed approached me. "No hard feelings," he said jocularly, and he held out his hand.

But is it a true joke — this American attempt at shirking responsibility under a bluff of facetiousness? It masquerades as humor every day — a pretty mongrel humor, more like true cowardice.

I turned to Scipio. "Tell this man that anything he wishes to say to me he will say through you."

Speed flushed darkly. Had he kept his temper, he could easily have turned my speech to ridicule. But such a manner of meeting him was novel to a man used to having his own brutal way wherever he went, and he was disconcerted. He spoke loudly and with bluster: —

"You said some things about my wife and son that don't go now."

This delivered him into my hands. Again I addressed Scipio. "Say that I wish his family no further misfortune; they have enough in having him for husband and father."

I think he would have shot me, but the others were now laughing. "He's called the turn on you, Lem. Leave him be. He's been annoyed some this morning."

They now made ready to depart with their recovered property.

"You and your friend will come along with us?" one said to Scipio.

"Thank you," I answered. "I have seen all that I ever wish to see of any of you."

And then suddenly I folded over and slid like a sack of flour from my horse. It had lasted longer than my nerves were good for; darkness engulfed me on the ground.

They had disappeared when I waked; Scipio and I were the only human tenants of the valley. He sat watching me, and I nodded to him; then silently shook my head at his question if I wanted anything. I lay gazing at the rocks and trees, the tall trees with their leaves gently stirring. It was

a beautiful, serene spot and I regarded it with the languid pleasure of a man recovering from a serious illness. We began to talk presently, and I learned that they had taken away their stolen horses, except the sorrel, which had been left at my complete disposal. But from that party I would accept no amends; I would ride the sorrel back to Wind River, and then I would send a check to the proper person, as if I had hired the horse. This intention I may say at once that I duly carried out. Scipio upbraided me with the spirit I was showing; they had meant no harm to *me*, he argued; they were doing their best now — but I turned upon him.

"Oh, their best! Do you think they'll not break out in a new place, condemn some other man who looks guilty to their almighty minds? I asked to see the post-trader. Don't forget that. There's got to be lynching where there's no law, but —"

To these unfinished words Scipio could find no answer, but he remained unconvinced, muttering that "tenderfeet shouldn't monkey with this country by themselves;" and in this sentiment I heartily concurred.

We spent the day and night at Still Hunt

Spring. There was nothing to call us away, and I found my physical powers more inclined to rest than to a long ride. Scipio dried out his clothes beside the spring, and refreshed his lank body from the perspiration and dust which had covered it. He narrated how it had been whispered that the cattlemen were on the eve of "demonstrating"; how McDonough's practices and associates had been gradually ascertained; how it was known that Still Hunt Spring had become a hiding-place for stolen stock. Therefore my bragging letter, written in a spirit so light, had given him what he described as "considerable of a jolt." He had not found it until evening, and had instantly galloped forth into the dark, not knowing what he might find at Still Hunt Spring.

"Then McDonough is a thief," I sighed.

"Oh, he's a thief all right," said Scipio, easily.

But it made me very sad. I closed my eyes and could see McDonough as he stood by my horse, embarrassed, reaching out his hand for that envelope with my verses on it.

I slept more soundly and longer even than on the preceding night. Scipio, after his hard ride, slept like me; we did not wake until the sun was high and warm. After breakfast — it was the

last morsel we had between us — I took a final drink at the gentle and lovely pool where I had undergone such terrible emotions, and we rode slowly and silently down the long line of trees toward the exit of the valley. Suddenly the sorrel jerked his head up, stopped stiff with a snort, and began to tremble. Ahead of us there, from the branch destined for me, hung a dead man, McDonough. This they had done while we overslept by the spring at the upper end of the valley. They had surprised him coming to his *cache*.

Scipio and I sat still for a while. A wind in the branches now set the body slightly swaying; it seemed worse when it moved; it turned halfway round, and I saw its eyes. "I think — couldn't we bury it?" I said.

Scipio shook his head. "It's left there for some of his partners to see."

"Well — I think we might close the eyes."

"That's no harm," said Scipio, "if you want."

"Yes; I do want."

So we dismounted. Yes; cards were all McDonough knew how to read; no one had ever taught him anything; this was his first lesson.

"There," said Scipio, "that does look better." Then we rode away from Still Hunt Spring.

VI

EXTRA DRY

MILE-HIGH in space circled a dark speck, a Mexican eagle, alone in the empty sky. He was looking down upon four hundred square miles of Arizona sand, called Repose Valley. He saw clots of cactus, thickets of mesquite, stunt oak bush, and white skeletons of cattle, but not a thing to eat. He also saw Aaron Tace, the shell-game man, in a Mexican hat. He saw also a man who, drifting lately to Tucson, had said his name was Belleville; but somebody in Tucson had pronounced this "Bellyful"; it was then vain to insist upon any other pronunciation.

Up in the sky sailed the eagle; along the desert road Aaron Tace was slowly riding; and on the ground lay Bellyful, near where the road forked to the mines. Aaron was going to Push Root. In that town a *fiesta* was being held; horses raced, liquors drunk, ladies courted, cards dealt, silver and gold lost by many and won by few, all to music. Bellyful was bound presently for Push Root,

too. Now he lay off the road under some mesquite, thinking, while Aaron approached. Made of thorns, slender rods, and gauze foliage, Bellyful's bushes cast little more shade than mosquito nets, but they cast all the shade there was. He was resting his starved, weak horse, whose legs must somehow walk the five more miles to Push Root. He, himself, with scant breakfast inside, had led the horse to the thin shade. The poor beast stood over him; now and then Bellyful reached up and stroked its nose. At sunrise the softened mountains had glowed like jewels, or ripe nectarines, or wine; cooling shadows had flowed from them upon the valley. Later morning had changed these peaks to gray, hot teeth, and the sand to a gray, hot floor. The horse rested, Aaron Tace was half a mile nearer, the eagle sailed, and Bellyful lay thinking of his luck.

He had known none in fifteen months. Misfortune bulged from the seams of his shirt and trousers and boots. Of his gold watch, his two pins, his ring, his sundry small possessions, only his gun remained: he could not pawn the seat of life. He had been earning and spending easily, when the first illness that he had ever known put him to bed, and almost in his grave. Coming back to

strength, he found hard times. No one, no railroad, ranch, restaurant, saloon, stage company — nothing — had employment for him. He had sought it from San Marcial, over in New Mexico, westward to Yuma, hundreds of miles. He had parted early with his real name. On a freight train at Bowie the conductor found him stealing a ride, and kicked him off, calling him a hobo. The epithet hurt worse than the kick. In fact, hiding on the brake-beam under another car (for in spite of the conductor he carried out his plan of riding free to Willcox) he shed tears, the bitter tears of pride departing; he *was* a hobo. By the time he reached Willcox, Belleville was his name. No tramp should be called what his mother had named him.

Such his life had been; dust, thirst, hunger, repulse — and onward to more. Existence shook her head at him with a changeless "No." Latterly, in Tucson, a pretty woman had shown him kindness which she should not, since he was not her husband and she had one. She fell in love with the April bloom of his years and with his hard luck — and this was the single instance of human interest in him which had touched his life in fifteen months. It lay light upon his rov-

ing conscience, was nothing but joy and pride to him; but his code forbade continued acceptance of her money that there seemed no chance to repay. Quitting Tucson, he took from her, as a final loan, enough to buy a wretched horse, with a trifle over. If none in Push Root would employ him, the mines were left; if these should fail, then he would have knocked at the door of every trade in Arizona, except robbery, which was undoubtedly the territory's chief industry.

Bellyful slid down a hand to his pocket's bottom. One by one he fingered seven coins therein, his whole fortune, in fractional currency — it summed up to a dollar and four bits. He drew out the coins and attentively read their dates. These he already knew. He was not thinking of the coins, but of the Universe, and how successfully it resisted explanation. A voice stopped him; Aaron Tace was nearly opposite his clump of mesquite. The shell-game man was talking to himself.

"Remember, gentlemen, the hand is quicker than the eye." This he said over and over, while his hands were ceaselessly moving. Bellyful rose with astonishment, and stared. Aaron Tace could easily have seen him, but was too busy.

He was making quick turns and passes, and talking the while.

"Remember, gentlemen, the hand is quicker than the eye." Nothing but that, while his hands paused, shuffled, and paused again.

"Remember, gentlemen —" It was like a player polishing his lines. Aaron rehearsed all the tones that express complete candor and friendly warning, with a touch of "dare you to try it!" thrown in. The reins hung on the horse's neck. Fitted to the saddle-horn (a very neat piece of work) was a smooth, wooden tray, and upon this three walnut shells in a line. These Aaron Tace would shift from right to left and back, or half back, exchanging their positions, sliding them among each other, lifting them up and setting them down — a pretty thing to see. Only one slip he made, due to a stumble of his horse. The little pebble, or pea, which the shifted shells concealed by turns to allure the bets of onlookers, rolled to the ground. Aaron sprang off limberly, found it, and was on again, busily rehearsing while his horse walked onward. He had now passed by, and a rock hid him from view; but for a long time still Bellyful could hear the rising and falling cadence of his "Re-

member, gentlemen, the hand is quicker than the eye," even after the syllables ceased to be distinguishable. Thus Aaron proceeded toward the Push Root *fiesta*, happy and busy, until his distant cadences died away.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Bellyful.

For perhaps an hour he lay, looking upward through the filmy mesquite, himself a piece of the vast silence. But this new light on the shell game helped little to render the Universe more susceptible of explanation. By and by he took his slow way along the road, and nothing living was left at the Forks. Far in the huge, blue, hot sky the eagle sailed, hunting his prey.

. . . . . .

Bellyful found the town of Push Root full of good nature. Indeed, there was more good nature than town; it spilled over the edges in strains of music, strains of language, and gentlemen overcome in the brush. But it was beyond the livery stable's good nature to trust any such looking owner of any such looking horse; Bellyful paid in advance. He inquired for employment at the stage office, the hardware store, the other store, the Palace Hotel, the other hotel, the Can-Can Restaurant, the Fashion Saloon, the

four other saloons, and the three private houses. These were locked because their owners were out, practising good nature. That finished it; there was no employment here. The horse could never make the mines without two meals and a night's rest — paid for already. No duty now hindered Bellyful from being good-natured himself. He still had three coins of slight importance to do it with, and his absent-minded fingers rubbed them over in his pocket.

Push Root teemed with strangers from ranch and mine, wandering joyously between drinks in search of new games. Through the many sounds Aaron's voice held its own, and, reaching Bellyful, waked his brooding mind, which had long forgotten Aaron. Some games he knew about, but this one had hitherto not been closely studied by him. Was the eye always slower than the hand? Practice makes perfect, but — ? With this dawn of scientific doubt Bellyful stood looking at the cluster of patrons which screened Aaron where he shuffled his three walnut shells and chanted his "Remember, gentlemen." A disordered-looking patron now emerged from the group, perceived Bellyful, lurched toward him, leaned against him confidingly, and remarked with tears: —

"Say, are you married? I am. Some people are fools all the time. I am. All people are fools some of the time. I am. And when I get home I'll get hell." He untied an old horse and rode desolately out of town.

Through the air, like a call, came Aaron's jaunty voice. Bellyful joined the patrons at once. Aaron shot over him a travelled, measuring eye, of which the not untravelled Bellyful took prompt note. He stood in the front row, staring with as simple an expression as he could command, slowly fumbling the poor little coins in his pocket. Soon the man next him won three dollars on a dime. Bellyful came near whistling, but repressed it in order to maintain his simple expression. Thirty to one! This game paid thirty to one! And the dawn of scientific doubt grew lighter.

"Try yourn." This suggestion somebody made to a youth of prosperous appearance, with an English neatness, and a cap and waistcoat of the horse-stable variety.

"Thanks, no, ye know. Seen it with thimbles at home, ye know."

None present was aware that this accent had been heard in no part of the British Isles at any

time. Yet, after a look at him, Bellyful's scientific doubt dawned a trifle clearer.

"Win three dollars?" cried an astonished freighter.

"Remember, gentlemen, the hand is quicker than the eye," said Aaron, instantly.

He shuffled his shells. The freighter's hairy fist made a "jeans dive." This well-known reach for money in the "pants" is composed of two gestures: the hand shoots down into the pocket, while the head tilts skyward. It is common where hay grows, and often foretells that the owner and his money will soon be parted. Bellyful now forgot all about his empty stomach. The freighter touched a shell, put down five cents, and won a dollar and a half.

"Megod!" exclaimed British Isles. He risked a quarter, and lost.

"Aw, now!" he lamented. "Good-by, all."

They rallied him, chaffed him, told him to come back and be a man; so, not to shame old England in a foreign country (as he explained), he doubled his quarter, and lost again.

"Remember, gentlemen," chanted Aaron, "the hand is quicker than the eye."

He shuffled the shells straight at the freighter,

as if he were making love to him. The freighter's eyes bulged; he dredged from his pocket a sort of bun of bills, greasy old rags pressed to a lump, gazed at them, touched them, smoothed them, and at last, amid general laughter, shoved them lingeringly back into his jeans. But his eyes seemed unrestful, and he mopped his brow.

"She's there!" bet British Isles, touching a shell.

"Take you," said Aaron.

British Isles put a dollar down. The pea was under the shell. Everybody saw the thirty dollars paid to British Isles. Aaron shuffled his shells anew.

"She's there!" thundered the freighter. His hand shot down, his head tilted up, and out came the bun again. A neighbor moved a gentle elbow against the freighter's ribs, and silently indicated another shell. In his excitement Bellyful now nearly forgot to keep looking innocent. The dawn of scientific doubt showed signs of sunrise; if this freighter should *lose*, all would be known to Bellyful but one last detail. If the freighter should *win* — why, then, a splendid theory went up in smoke.

The neighbor pushed a little harder with his

He shuffled the shells straight at the freighter as if he were making love to him

elbow. This time the freighter felt it. He backed away from the neighbor with glaring indignation.

"Ho, no, young man!" he exclaimed loudly. "Keep your tips for greenhorns that ain't on to this game." He flayed twenty dollars off his bun. "She's under there," he declared, tapping his own shell again.

"Take you," said Aaron. He lifted the shell. No pea was there!

"Aw!" commented British Isles sympathetically. "Come again, sir. You'll be apt to swat him next time."

But the unhappy freighter stood still in an ox-like bewilderment, turning large, rueful eyes now upon the shuffling shells and now upon the neighbor, whose lip curled with a cold, wise smile.

Scientific doubt was rosy everywhere; full knowledge might break at any minute. Bellyful knew now that the freighter was too innocent to be true, that he was in it with Aaron, in it with British Isles, that the three of them had a united eye upon some fat quarry, and were playing a game to bag him. Who was it? Bellyful looked at every man.

"Are you on yet?" whispered the neighbor,

edging up. While the bets and shuffling went on, he whispered wisdom behind his hand to Bellyful. Aaron won steadily in a small way till a lull in business came; this he cured by losing sixty well-timed dollars to British Isles. Small business picked up at once. Some people are fools all the time, all people are fools some of the time — but when was the fat quarry coming? Every little while the neighbor dropped more expert wisdom into Bellyful's ear. "A bad thing," he whispered, "ever to take your eye off the shells. While that hayseed freighter was looking at the sky, just now, the shells had been changed round. Hard to prove it, too, even if you thought you saw it. Best way of all was, keep your hand on the shell you bet on. Don't let him move it and talk, for even if the pea was under it he could get it away. He'd never let you win if he didn't want you to. Keep your hand on your shell."

"H'm," answered Bellyful.

"Here's the real trick," continued the expert neighbor. "He shuffles till he sees by your eye you've spotted a shell. Maybe he leads you on to spot a shell by playing awkward. And he claps down the shell."

"H'm," responded Bellyful again.

"No. I hadn't finished," explained the expert. "Of course the pea is not under that shell. Where is it? Nestling in his little right finger. Some of 'em is both-handed and can work two peas. So, when you bet, no pea is under any shell. You're bound to lose, see? And see how he holds his shells with them two end fingers crooked in and how he stoops over 'em close to the edge of the table now and then."

"H'm," unchangeably remarked Bellyful.

"Yes, but you ain't watching," complained the expert. "When he scrapes a shell close to the edge, that's when the pea's liable to tumble into his little finger. I'm going after him in a minute."

A flash came into Bellyful's eye. He turned his head for one look at the expert. It satisfied him.

"I guess you're catching on now," said the expert. "There! The pea's in his finger. Watch me."

Bellyful watched.

The expert had gold pieces, plenty of them, all sizes. He put down five dollars. "I'll pick up," he said, "the two shells the pea's not under."

"Take you," said Aaron.

The expert quickly picked up two shells. But the pea was under one of them.

"You win," said Aaron instantly, and instantly caught up all three shells and shuffled them. One hundred and fifty dollars to the expert, though he had really lost! "See what that means?" he whispered to Bellyful. "He paid me not to expose him."

"H'm," replied Bellyful.

"Watch me again," urged the expert.

Indeed, Bellyful did. Scientific doubt was over; the full sun had risen.

Once more the shuffled shells came to rest, enticing bets, when violent voices arose off to the left. Aaron quite — oh, quite! — forgot, and looked away to see what the noise was. The freighter quickly lifted a shell. The pea was there. He clapped the shell down.

"Put your hand on that, young man," he commanded. "She's there," he shouted to Aaron, whose eye had now come back. The disturbance had been some brief trouble between British Isles and a man near him; it was quieted. The freighter bet the rest of his money — that large bun. The expert, with his hand on the shell, bet all his gold — it made several stacks.

"Take you," said Aaron.

The pea wasn't beneath the shell!

"Too bad, gentlemen," said Aaron, gathering promptly all the money and the shells, and shoving everything into his pockets. "Well, I told you the hand was quicker than the eye. Good-by! Better luck next time!" He nodded kindly, and was gone.

The game was done, the patrons dispersed. British Isles and the freighter no longer to be seen, everybody melted away among the wagons, the horses, the people, the sounds, the shows, the music of the general *fiesta*. On the deserted spot stood the expert and Bellyful, looking at each other.

"What are you trembling about?" demanded the expert, sharply.

"I don't know," said Bellyful. He didn't know.

"Five hundred and thirty-five dollars," muttered the expert, hoarsely. "That freighter got the pea out when he scraped that shell down."

"They were, all three, laying for you from the start," said Bellyful. He couldn't stop trembling. Perhaps it was want of food.

"Five hundred and thirty-five dollars," wailed the expert.

After that, he, too, melted away.

. . . . . .

Five miles out of Push Root, where the road forks to the mines, nothing had changed, except the name of the day. Repose Valley had not aged in twenty-four hours; it may be doubted if Repose Valley could have looked older in twenty-four million hours. Its sand was hot and gray, its mountains were hot and gray, its sunlight glared like a curse. No breeze, no water, no shade; gauze mesquite, stiff cactus, white cattle bones — four hundred square miles of this, quite as usual. It might just as well have been yesterday, but for its name. All the days of the week here might have sat for each other's photographs. Only the Creator could have told them apart. Up in the blue air sailed the eagle. Evidently he must find meals in Repose Valley, else he wouldn't be here, sailing and watching. He saw the same horse and the same Bellyful resting beneath the same mesquite. He saw also, away off, the same Aaron riding slowly along the road toward the Forks — only, this morning, Aaron was coming from Push Root instead of going to it. This proved it wasn't yesterday. Aaron had out his practice-table, and his hands were industrious.

Again Bellyful lay thinking, His horse was better for the hay and corn and eighteen hours of rest; but the mines were further than Push Root, and he must get there, there was nowhere else left to get — except *out!* As he lay under the mesquite, Bellyful made one gesture — he shook his fist at the sky. They might put him out, but he wouldn't get out.

It might be said that the only difference between the Bellyful of yesterday and him of to-day was the difference of one dollar and four bits. He had nothing now in his pocket; those last coins had paid for what food they could buy him. But there was another difference. It had been wrought during the night hours, wrought while he lay in the stable, unable to sleep, possibly wrought also, even in the sleep he at length fell into just before daylight; for, while he slept, his heart went on beating, of course, and what was his soul doing?

After his single gesture he lay under the mesquite motionless, gazing up through the filmy branches, quiet as a stone, deep sunk in the heart of Repose Valley silence. Stretched so, still beneath the same mesquite, he looked as if he had been there since yesterday, as if in all the to-

morrows he might be there, keeping the cattle bones company. But the whole boy—every inch of flesh and spirit—was alive, very much alive, not at all in a moderate, everyday fashion; in fact, Bellyful was a powder magazine, needing nothing but a match. Existence had shaken her head at him once too often.

He didn't suspect his own state until the match was applied. Aaron's approaching voice reached him. Even the eagle, a mile up in the air, stopped hunting to witness the sudden proceedings. Bellyful leaped to his feet, looked at the rock which blocked him and his horse from Aaron's view, moved the passive beast a few paces back, looked at the rock again, was satisfied, ran like wild game behind the rock, and waited. His pistol was always in excellent order, a clean-polished, incongruous gleam to flash forth from such a rusty scarecrow.

The talking Aaron came along, happy and busy. His head bent over his shuffled shells; the rise and fall of his cadences grew clearer, the sounds began to take to themselves syllables; first "hand" and "eye" came out distinct, then the links between filled in, and the whole sentence rang perfect through the unstirred air.

"Remember, gentlemen, the hand is quicker than the eye."

Such rehearsals as this must have helped many a monotonous journey to pass pleasantly for Aaron — not to speak of placing him in the foremost ranks of Art.

"Remember, gentlemen, the hand is quicker than the eye."

"Not this morning."

The shells smashed in Aaron's horrified grasp. The little pea rolled to the ground.

"Going to the mines?" pursued Bellyful. All his words were sweet and dreadful.

Then Aaron saw behind the pistol who it was.

"That kid a road-agent!" he thought. "Why didn't I spot him yesterday?" And he blamed his own blindness, miserably and quite unjustly, because how could he know that Bellyful had only become a road-agent in the last ten minutes?

"Strip," said Bellyful.

Aaron was slow about it.

A flash, a smoke, and a hole through Aaron's Mexican hat cleared every doubt.

"You're mature, I see," remarked Aaron, and offered his unbuckled pistol.

"The other one now," commanded Bellyful.

This was a guess, but a correct one. "Leave 'em both drop down."

Both dropped down.

"Go on strippin'."

The money followed, a good deal of it, and Aaron made a gesture of emptiness.

"That all?"

"Yes, indeed, young man."

"Then I want the rest of it."

"You've got the rest. You've got the whole. The game ain't what it used to be, and I have partners; they —

"I'll partner you. Get down. Get down quick."

Evidently a compromise was the very most a poor shell-game man in this hapless crisis could hope for. Aaron got down and addressed the road-agent.

"See here, beau," he began, "you and me oughtn't to be hostile. In our trade we can't afford it. You and me's brothers."

"Don't you call me brother. I don't lie. I say 'hand it over' and folks ain't deceived. I'm an outlaw and, maybe, my life is forfeit. But you pretend you're an honest man and that your dirty game is square. Throw it all down, or I'll tear it out of you."

How could he know that Bellyful had only become a road-agent in the last ten minutes?

Aaron threw it all down. Then he was allowed to go his ways, seeking more fools to cheat.

Up in the air the eagle sailed. He was still looking down upon clots of cactus, thickets of mesquite, and skeletons of cattle. He also saw a horseman going slowly one way, and a horseman going slowly the other. In time many miles lay between them, and the forks of the road were as silent and empty of motion as the rest of Repose Valley.

. . . . . .

To me, listening, Scipio Le Moyne narrated the foregoing anecdote while he lay in hospital, badly crumpled up by a bad horse. Upon the day following I brought him my written version.

"Yes," he said musingly, when I had finished reading it to him, "that — happened — eight — years — ago. You've told it about correct — as to facts."

"What's wrong, then?"

"Oh — I ain't competent to pass on your language. The facts are correct. What are you lookin' at me about?"

"Well — the ending."

"Ending?"

"Well — I don't like the way Bellyful just went off and prospered and — "

"But he did."

"And never felt sorry or — "

"But he didn't."

"Well — "

"D'you claim he'd oughtn't? Think of him! Will y'u please to think of him after that shell game? He begging honest work and denied all over, everywhere, till his hat and his clothes and his boots were in holes, and his body was pretty near in holes — think of him, just a kind of hollo' vessel of hunger lying in that stable while the shell-game cheat goes off with his pockets full of gold." Scipio spoke with heat.

"Yes, I know. But, if Bellyful afterward could only feel sorry and try — "

"Are you figuring to fix that up?" — he was still hotter — "because I forbid you to monkey with the truth. Because I *never* was sorry."

"*What?*"

"I was Bellyful," said Scipio, becoming quiet. "Yes, that was eight years ago." He mused still more, his eyes grew wistful. "I was nineteen then. God, what good times I have had!"

VII

WHERE IT WAS

When Scipio had brought to an end the edifying anecdote, he lay in his hospital bed, silent and a little tired after so sustained a recital.

"Why not write," I inquired, "a book, and call it Tales From My Past?"

He looked at me suspiciously, but suspicion melted into what immediately sparkled in the tones of his reply. "In spite of my ancestors, I don't know French."

For an instant I was stupid — I have many such instants.

"You've often told me," he had to explain, "that in France y'u can print anything."

"Oh, well!" I laughed, "quite a number of yours are harmless enough — even for our magazines. This one for instance."

But his thoughts had gone on; he was gazing through the open window with a craving eye. All out-of-doors was his true home, his hearth

and bed, his natural workshop and playground; indoors had been merely his occasional resort — a place where a man went for a brief visit when he felt like spending his money. "I'm goin' to get well," he said, still watching the far-off, golden hills. "I *am* getting well. And wunst I'm on my legs I'll start makin' a lot more Past."

"Do!" I exclaimed. "Do. It isn't everybody who can, even when they try."

He grunted. "Huh! I ain't never tried much. Didn't have to. Things just kind o' seem to happen when I'm around."

"Did you lie just now?" I asked.

"Lie? When?"

"Didn't you fix up the ending?"

"Fix up nothin'! That's what them two old junipers actually did."

"You'll remember," I persisted, "you forbade me the other day to 'monkey with the facts,' when I told you I didn't like the ending of Bellyful's adventure in Repose Valley."

"Sure! Us Western men don't care about fixed-up things when we know how things are — when we've been the things ourselves. And will you tell me" — Scipio grew earnest — "what's the point of a book lyin' about life the way

more'n half of 'em do? The way I wouldn't let y'u do about Bellyful?"

"Oh, our sincere and pious public is determined that virtue shall triumph in print, anyhow — and that nothing naked is true until draped."

"Not me. I don't want any of them bib-and-tucker-and-safety-pin stories they hand you out. What made y'u think I'd lied?"

"Well. it seemed too good, too virtuous, too right."

He grinned, and I perceived this to be at my expense — he had caught *me* taking divergent postures toward life and toward print.

"I surrender!" I laughed. "I'm a liar too!"

His grin now faded. "Now and then, y'u know, people do act decent. I've met several besides them two old men. Even along the Rio Grande. Why, I've acted decent myself at times." He seemed to review his recent anecdote. "The point was," he said next, "*they* always thought they were madder than they *were*. Now *I'm* just the other way. I'm that good-natured that I'm frequently madder than I feel — and it's the other man finds that out!"

"Get out of here!" said the post doctor, entering. "Look at your victim's eyes!"

So I went out, ashamed of myself at having led poor Scipio to talk so much. I needn't change a syllable of as many as I recollect in his anecdote. His impression of the Thowmet Valley as it had been in those earlier days — before apples, before the Great Northern, before anything — shall not be "fixed up" by me.

I'd been seein' a lot of country, clear up from Mazatlan to the Big Bend — driftin' through Old Mexico and California and Awregon, and over for a little while to Boisé, and up through the Palouse where the dust puffed up from the ploughs and trailed like a freight-train's smoke does on the Southern Pacific for a half-hour after she's went by; and I'd crossed the God-awful Big Bend — but I'll skip that — and I'd crossed the stinkin', vicious Columbia on a chain ferry — but I'll skip that — and I was kind o' tired. Didn't want no mines either. There was mines up there and folks crowdin' to 'em, thick from everywheres. But I was tired. Figured I'd put in the balance of the fall — and the winter, too, maybe — in some pleasant place, if they could direct me to such a thing. So they told me there was women — wives, I mean — and children and homes and

neighbors over on the Thowmet. So I headed for there. Went in with a Siwash over the Chillowisp trail. Him and me couldn't talk much, but we could nod and point and grunt when his English and my Chinook gave out. He carried the mail in wunst a week, except when the snow wouldn't let him. That proved to be often. Oh, but I liked the Thowmet Valley's looks that first sight! And it stayed pleasant to me. Why did I leave it? Don't know. Just got curious to see some more country.

There wasn't any homes to see as the Injun and me rode down the hill. But trees that could shade you, and grass a horse could eat, and water not runnin' like it wanted to kill you, but friendly water. And the mountains all around was pleasant too — timber on 'em. Snow not on 'em yet, except a dozen or so high-up, far-back patches, lyin' around white like wash-day. So we rode along up the valley and camped, and next day struck a cabin, and corral and haystacks. Sure enough! Married man with wife and kids. Kids had regular Texas-colored hair. But the most homes was farther up the river, they said, near the Forks and store; and so I went along with the Siwash, who was bound for the store with his

mail-sack. The store was the post-office, of course — Beekman was its name. We passed by a tent 'side of the road, and voices was screechin' inside the tent, and the Siwash he started to laugh. So I asked him what he knowed about it. Let me see. What did he say? I don't have use any more for the Chinook I learned up there. Oh, yes! He said: —

"*Klaska tenas man, klaska hyas pilton.*"

So I didn't know what that meant, and there wasn't much good mentioning this to him; but I didn't have to, for they came a-rushin' out of the tent, no hats on.

"How does a coyote walk?" screeched out the littlest one, aimin' his finger at me.

Well, I felt huffy — never'd saw him before or his partner neither — didn't catch the joke — but he wasn't jokin'. The big one arrives and he yells: —

"Don't he walk separate?"

"He walks together, don't he?" yells the little one.

Little one had scrambled hair, white, and it hadn't been cut lately. Big partner had left his hair behind him somewheres along life's journey. They was glarin' up at me for an answer.

So I said: "Tell me what you mean."

So they did. They was trappers. One claimed you could always tell a coyote's tracks by the way he put his right foot and his left foot down in different places, so you could tell he was a four-footed animal; and the other he said that was the way the bobcat and the link and the mountain-lion walked. And then the first one he yelled out that they struck one foot right in the other foot's track, so it looked like a two-footed animal had been walkin' there.

"That's all easy," I said; for I've trapped some myself.

So I set 'em straight as to the facts. Thing was, they quieted down right off and took my say-so. But that was their way, I found — get up a regular state-of-things that would mean trouble, you'd suppose, and drop it as if nobody'd said a word.

"Come and finish dinner," says the little one to the big one.

"Dinner!" says the big one. "Quit your dining. You've eet enough to wake the dead."

So they starts back to their tent like twins. I expect they were sixty, or seventy, or eighty — I don't know how long they'd lasted in this world —

and one had boots, and the other had his feet tied in gunnysack, and both looked like two-bits' worth of God-help-us.

But they didn't get to their tent that time. Down the road comes a nice-lookin' girl on a calico horse with one blue eye — the horse had — and the little one he sees her and he whirls around and aims his finger at her, same as he done to me.

"No, you don't!" says he, loud up in the air. "I've told you I won't."

"I had no intention of speaking about it again," says she, rather quiet, but smilin.' "But when you find that there's no coal really there —"

Well, what d'y'u think? It set 'em wild. Both of 'em went plumb wild. I couldn't hear for a while what the trouble was, because they scrambled their words just like the little one's hair, talkin' to the girl and me and the Siwash and each other. But the Siwash he gave another laugh and rode away — he had his mail. I stayed. I hadn't got used to 'em yet. Thought maybe she'd better have a man around. But they was absolutely harmless. And then I began to understand.

The girl she sat there indulgin' 'em. Told 'em

she wasn't goin' to worry 'em about it any more. They told her there was coal there and they was goin' to supply the whole valley, and it was better than a gold-mine. She might just as well have worried 'em instead of sittin' so peaceful on the calico horse, because they would never have noticed any worryin' she could do — they was that busy with the worry they were keepin' up all by themselves. She was a school-teacher and up to now she'd kept school in a tent. But the valley was going to build a school-house and the best location for it happened to be on some land they'd filed on. Any other place would be too far for somebody's kids, or for everybody's, or else hadn't water convenient. But it seemed they wouldn't hear of it. I suppose whoever put it to 'em first had put it wrong, and now all y'u had to do was say "school-house" in their hearing, and have a circus prompt.

"Mr. Edmund," says she to me, "says that if their idea of other minerals is like their idea of coal, it's no wonder they have found trapping more profitable. But no one can persuade them, and it's truly a pity about the school-house." Mr. Edmund kept the store at Beekman.

"If it's not coal," says I, "what is it?"

"Oh, slate, or graphite, or something — and just a tiny ledge, and too far from transportation."

"Well, then, it don't burn."

"You can't reason with them," says she. And she smiles down at them two quarrelin', fussin' old men. It would have brought me to reason, her smile would, but she never gave it to me.

Yes, she indulged 'em. The valley indulged 'em right along. They was so old and so harmless. Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy was their names — all the names I ever heard for 'em — and they'd been most everywheres before other people had. Been acrost the Isthmus and round the Horn, they claimed — not together, y'u know, but they had met when they was young. Their trails had crossed somewheres in Sonora. Then they'd met again on the Santa Fé trail, when they was still young. And so now and then they'd kep' a-meetin' and a-growin' less young. Been through the gold excitement of '49. Drifted up to Portland. Got separated at Klamath about the time of the Modoc War. Didn't see each other again till both come face to face over in the Okanogan country — and then they was old. They remembered former days, and it tied 'em together. They was goin' to Africa next time they felt like they

needed a change of air. Kultus Jake's hair was all the moss he'd ever gathered, and Frisco Baldy he seemed to have gathered nothin' whatever. But they packed around a big harvest of years — no one ever knowed the sum of it. Wunst in a while they would speak of something they had done together long ago. Then y'u knew the silent tie between 'em. I don't wish to live that long and have to look backward when I want to see anything of promise. It's awful when everybody has to indulge y'u — time to quit then. But y'u needn't to pity Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy, for they was just as set and cheerful about goin' to Africa as young rich folks talkin' over what waterin' place they'll visit next summer. Liveliest old junipers that ever I see!

Kultus, y'u know, is Chinook, and it's used for most anything that don't amount to nothin'. And while we're on Chinook, here's something funny. *Potlatch* means a gift. Now you'd suppose *kultus potlatch* would be a poor gift — counterfeit dollar or a dozen rotten eggs, for instance. Well, you're wrong. You give a man a bridle, or a hindquarter of venison, or anything y'u choose, and say nothin' when y'u give it — that's just a plain common *potlatch*, and it means he's ex-

pected by all the rules to give you something pretty soon, something as good as your bridle or your deer. But you say "*Kultus potlatch*" to him, and then he'll be genuinely grateful, for that means you're just makin' him a real present out of the warmness of your heart, and don't expect him to come back at y'u with a huckleberry for your persimmon. Why, when a Siwash — the custom came from them — gave me somethin' in silence, it used to worry me 'most to death.

What the mail-carrier said to me the first day, when the two old men was screechin' inside their tent, was that they were children and fools. But he was an Injun and did not have indulgent feelings. I saw more of 'em and didn't mind 'em. I fell into a job at the Forks. Mr. Edmund wanted somebody else in the store, and I could write a plain hand and add figures fairly correct. He was kind of mad about the school-house, havin' the interests of the valley at heart, and he used to watch the days gettin' shorter. Mr. Edmund had everything at heart — too much at heart — other folks' troubles as well as his own. He would lecture me about them in his deep-down voice. School wouldn't do in a tent after snow came, and he saw that this would come down to

havin' school in his own cabin if the children was to get any teachin' at all. He was the only one that didn't leave 'em alone about their coal-mine. Offered to buy it off 'em wunst, and they screeched for ten minutes. Threatened to write to Washington and have him removed for takin' advantage of his office.

"Why, you don't know where Washington is," says he, with his voice down in the cellar.

"Washington, D.C.?" screeches Kultus Jake. "I don't know? I been there!"

"Washington, D.C.," repeats Edmund slow, like Fate a-comin'. "You don't know where it is." That was Edmund all over. His way o' jokin'.

"It's in Maryland," says Frisco Baldy.

"Virginia, y'u singed porcupine!" yells Kultus Jake. "Don't I tell y'u I been there?"

And I seen they both meant it. And I seen this really grieved Edmund instead of pleasin' him. He took it to heart. Well, sir, I just went acrost the store and lay down on the flour-sacks. Kicked up my heels. Guess I made more noise than the old men did. After a minute I lifted up to see what Edmund was doin', and he'd pushed his spectacles up high

on his forehead and was lookin' at the two scrappin' about Washington, D.C., out of his awful solemn eyes; so I laid down again flat. If Edmund had talked I couldn't have heard him, but as a matter of fact he just let 'em go it alone; and they, like they pretty much always done, got switched off on to somethin' else — this time it was the traps. There was some number fours hanging there, and they both happened to agree it was number fours they would take when they started into the mountains to trap for the winter. So traps made 'em forget about Washington, D.C., and *it* had made 'em forget about exposin' Edmund, which had made 'em forget the coal-mine and the school-house, and so they departed entirely peaceful out of the store and over the Thowmet to their tent, which they had moved up to the Forks. Then I looks up from the sacks again. There stands Edmund behind his desk, same as ever, spectacles away up on his forehead, only now his solemn eyes was fixed on me. And I looks at him, not knowin' what on earth he's goin' to say or whether he's mad or ain't mad — for y'u couldn't often tell from his face. For a young man — and he was young — he was a lot growed

up. I expect he knew sorrow early. Both of us was quite silent.

"I didn't know they didn't know," says Edmund, like he was breaking the news of a death to y'u.

And I lays right down again on the sacks.

"Good Lord!" says Edmund, "what ignorance. The capital of their country!"

But I could only fight for my breath, and cry and cry.

Next time I could see anything, there was Edmund sittin' on the counter clost alongside of me, legs danglin' against the sacks. But that time when I looked at him he laughed — laughed all through fit to kill himself, same as I'd been doin'. And it was at himself, y'u know, as well as at the whole thing; he included himself in the show.

"You're quite right," says he.

That was what made y'u love Edmund. When a thing like Washington, D.C., came up, he'd most always get it wrong first — see the bad side of it too big and the good side too small — he had a heap of misplaced seriousness in his system to conquer. But he'd sure conquer it every time if y'u gave him time. It took me

the whole first week I worked for him in the store to find this out. Edmund was the squarest man I have ever known. Too square. And about the finest. He was from an Eastern college and entirely wasted on the Thowmet Valley, where nobody but him had any education or understood honesty as he understood it.

"But they're obstacles to the public good here, all the same," said he next; and I had to think back before I saw he meant the old men was obstructin' the school-house and thereby withholdin' light from the young hope of the great empire of the Northwest.

He came back to it too, several days after that, while the school-teacher was orderin' slate-pencils.

"Oh, leave them alone," says she. "Mr. Edmund, you'll just make 'em worse."

But he was in for an argument. He settled those eyes of his on her with his regular May-God-have-mercy-on-your-soul expression, and he told her she'd ought to know better. But she didn't mind him any more'n I did. She liked him.

"You know as well as I do," says he, "that children should be an improvement on their

parents, especially when those parents come from Texas. Texas is a large place," he goes on, "and I am willin' to believe that it contains thousands of enlightened and refined persons — but they don't come here. If your scholars don't learn to read and write, where's any progress to come from?"

"Well, Mr. Edmund," says she, "all I know is that you will never help me, or the schoolhouse, or progress, by calling Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy a pair of inspected and condemned mules to their faces."

I didn't know he'd called 'em that. Must have been outside the store somewheres. Edmund could turn his tongue wrong-side-out when he felt like it. "That's what they are," says he, laughin' at his own words, which he had forgotten. "But as for this valley, it was inhabited by better citizens when the wild animals lived here. I prefer a black-tailed deer to a Texan. Don't waste your money on those chocolates, Miss Carey."

"Why, what's wrong with them?" says she, with the box in her hand.

"There's no chocolate in 'em," says Edmund. "The wholesale house cheated me. I'd send

'em back, but I'd sold too much before I found out. This candy here," says he, showin' her some more, "seems to be what it claims to be."

And then, while she seemed to hesitate over the chocolates, what do y'u suppose he does? Takes the box sudden out of her hand, walks out to the river bank and throws the whole outfit plop into the water!

"Isn't that just like him!" says she to me, very quiet, while he was out on the bank. And it was. Yes, Edmund is the only fool I ever loved.

She kept starin' out at him, and in a minute we heard the noise of a boat bein' rowed acrost the Thowmet. Edmund he stands watchin' whoever it was below. Next minute up the bank comes Kultus Jake.

"No use your divin' for that candy," says Edmund; "it's all melted by now."

But Jake didn't know about the candy and he had somethin' on his mind. His old innocent blue eyes was troubled.

"Decided where Washington, D.C., is?" says Edmund, walkin' ahead of him into the store.

But that didn't faze Jake; he'd come to say somethin'. I thought Washington, D.C., was a

thing of the past. As a matter of fact it hadn't scarcely begun; it was bidin' its time for all of us, though none of us could ever suspect that.

"Well, where's your partner this afternoon?" says Edmund.

Kultus Jake he walks around the store blinkin' at the various goods, and he touches a trap here and a blanket there and after a while he answers: —

"Oh, he's over to Pipestone Cañon." And he walks around and touches some more goods.

"Figure you'll get into the mountains this season?" says Edmund.

"Yes," says Jake. "Next week." Then he walks up close to Edmund. "Baldy's over to Pipestone Cañon," says he. "We're goin' to start next week. Don't want the snow to get ahead of us. Mink and marten reported plentiful up Robinson Creek. One man seen a silver-gray fox. Guess we'll do pretty well this winter. Live in Robinson Cabin — it ain't fallen down like they claimed." And he took another turn around by the door. Well, all this wasn't much to tell people. We knowed all that ourselves — but Jake just then made up his mind quick to say what he'd come to say.

"Don't you josh Baldy," says he, comin' back

close up to Edmund. "Don't you do it any more. I don't mind joshin', but Baldy — he's old."

And out he goes. He went down the bank, and next y'u could hear the knockin' of his oars, as he rowed himself back over the Thowmet to their tent. Miss Carey she looked at the door where he'd gone out, smilin' very pretty. It takes a woman to understand them feelin's men has, but conceals.

"Well, I must be getting home for supper," says she. She boarded a little ways up the North Fork with some folks that had quite a family. But when she's outside, just startin' to untie her horse, "Why, here comes Frisco Baldy!" says she, and waits for him.

Frisco Baldy was comin', sure enough, ridin' up the river quite slow, and lookin' acrost at where their tent was in the flat land this side o' the blacksmith's cabin. Then we knowed Jake had spied him and that was what made him speak out so quick.

Baldy he arrives and gets down. "Been over to Pipestone Cañon," says he. "We'll be startin' for the Robinson Cabin next week, I guess. Snow's not meltin' on the mountain tops any more. She's liable to come down here for keeps any day.

Well — we'll be needin' a lot o' truck off you. Beans and pork and coffee, and stuff in general — me and Jake'll be over to see you about it. Guess you'll have to let us pay you in furs when we come out in the spring. Old man Parrigin seen a silver-gray fox. Say!" And Baldy walks clost up to Edmund. "Don't you josh Jake. He's old."

And out he goes!

I looks at Miss Carey — just in time to catch her whippin' her handkerchief away from her eye.

"Well," begins Edmund — but she bursts right out on him.

"Don't you say anything! Don't say a thing!" she cries. "They're just two poor, quaint, dear, helpless old waifs." Oh, she looked at Edmund perfectly ragin'.

I didn't know what Edmund would do about that. He had an awful quick temper. But he gives a smile pretty near as lovely as hern had been, and his solemn brown eyes merely looked kind o' surprised.

"Why," says he, "I was goin' to say I would grubstake 'em for nothin'. They needn't give me any furs."

It pulled her right up short and I don't know

what she would have said, for there was Frisco Baldy on the bank, hollerin' and throwin' his arms up and down. I run out. I thought somebody was in trouble. Just in the bend there below where the North Fork comes in, there's a big deep hole. Well, nobody was in no trouble. Jake was rowin' himself over to our side again, and Baldy appeared not to want him over on our side. So he kept a-bellerin' and throwin' his arms, and Jake he came along over, not mindin' about Baldy on the bank. He landed and clumb up the bank right past Baldy, and Baldy he yells out: —

"Didn't y'u see me tellin' y'u to stay over there?"

"Yes, I seen y'u and I come," says Jake, not yellin', but in his nat'ral voice. And he starts past him.

"Didn't y'u see I've got the horse and can cross at the ford without y'u?"

That starts Jake and he yells back: "I didn't come for you; I came for a box of matches, y'u bawlin' bobcat."

So there they was at it again, scrappin' about nothin' at all. And Jake he bought his matches, mad, and cleared out to his boat; and old Baldy he got on his horse, mad, and cleared out to the

ford; and I don't know, when they got to their tent, whether they went on with that partic'lar dissension or whether they'd forgot all about it and had to start up a new one to keep 'em from feelin' lost. Oh, they'd contracted the habit o' disagreement, I suppose, same as a man gets to depend on havin' a quid of tobacco in his cheek. But while speakin' to Edmund about his joshin', the eyes of both of 'em had given away the store they set by each other.

Miss Carey she went home with her slate-pencils ordered and some candy Edmund's conscience was willin' for him to recommend, and me and Edmund was left alone in the store. I wanted to say somethin' about Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy's latest unpleasantness, and somethin' about the way each one had sneaked in to ask Edmund not to josh the other one any more; and I had things to say about the bad chocolates, and about Edmund's plan of grubstakin' the old junipers when they should start into the mountains for a winter's trappin' — I was full of conversation, but Edmund wasn't. He was loaded plumb to the gills with silence. I could tell that from his looks. I had come to know by hard experience that there was spells when Edmund not only

didn't want to say a word himself, but didn't want you to, either. And if y'u happened to say anythin'—don't care what—he'd fly at y'u. I said wunst it was goin' to rain, and just merely this started Edmund roundin' me up for the inattentive way I had of lettin' my mind wander from my business. It did rain, too. So now I wondered for a while what he'd say when he felt like speakin' once more. It was generally some very peculiar remark y'u couldn't foresee. Of course Edmund was college-raised, but it wasn't no college-raisin' made him Edmund. I've saw heaps of graduates and undergraduates and they're just like other people when y'u come to know 'em. But I'd forgot wonderin' by the time Edmund did speak. He made me jump.

"I am the oldest man in this valley."

That is what he said in the store long after dark with two lamps. He was makin' out an order to send to Seattle by the mail next day—a big order, because it was likely to be the last lot of goods we could send for that year. Freight teams couldn't get into the valley after the heavy snow came.

Well, I didn't say anythin', for I wasn't full of conversation any more. Edmund he stands back

of his desk and shoves his spectacles up on his forehead, and his eyes was lookin' at me so y'u'd have thought I'd committed — well, most anythin'.

"Very much the oldest man in this valley," says Edmund, lookin' more serious — if possible.

"All right," says I.

"I will be twenty-five," says Edmund, "next fourteenth of July. I'm going to bed."

So he marched out with his lamp and left me in the store with all the shadows and things, and the sound of the North Fork rapids under the bridge. One lamp made awful little light in that store. D'y'u think I laughed at Edmund then, like I so often did? Not a bit. I sat down on the counter and thought him over. And for the first time I expect I saw him clear. Saw him alone in that valley, unlike anybody or anythin' that was there, or likely to come there. And him with his college mates and all men and women who set store by him miles and miles and miles away in the East. It made me feel old and lonesome myself! And then — throwin' those chocolates into the river! Maybe he was the oldest man in the valley, for Jake and Baldy had crossed the line into childhood.

But I laughed at him next mornin'. The Siwash had started down the valley with the mail and no one had come to the store yet that early — it was dark. So Edmund had nothin' to do, and he was weighin' himself on the scales.

"I don't gain," says he, disgusted. "Not a pound in a year."

"Y'u don't think the thoughts that make a man fat," says I.

"A hundred and forty," says he, and jumps down.

Well, I did weigh a hundred and sixty, stripped, right along — and we was pretty near of a height. Maybe I had half an inch the better of him. "But," I tells him for consolation, "it's your great age. You'll be twenty-five next July and I was only twenty-four last June." It was November we was in, y'u know. So I laughs.

"Yes!" he says. "You twenty-four! You stopped maturing at six." And he laughs, too.

The Siwash was late comin' back with the mail over the Chillowisp. Snow must have been three foot deep in the mountains, and it lay for quite a while in the valley, so we thought Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy had waited too late and would lose their chance to get to their trappin'. They did lose it, too, but not exactly that way —

but I'll come to that point when I get there. Snow druv school indoors. Miss Carey she had to quit the tent — and sure enough it turned out like I told y'u. Edmund's sittin'-room was filled up with Texan kids — Edmund's private room, which he had so nicely fixed up with all his college things: mugs, flags, an oar, pictures of his friends, a whole heap of stuff. It had to be used for the school, bein' the only possible place, or school had to stop till spring come round and the tent could serve again. Well, Edmund wasn't willin' to cut off the hope of the empire of the Northwest for five whole months. Of course they wasn't there Saturdays and Sundays, or at night, or at hours when he really needed his room — he was in the store durin' school-time — but every day, after the kids had gone home, poor Edmund he had to open all the windows of his pet room. He caught Miss Carey sweepin' it of their leavin's and scolded her savage for that. Insisted on sweepin' it himself. Would have his way. My sakes, but he was a cross man every day while he was sweepin'! Then the kids they bruck one or two of his souvenirs, touchin' and meddlin' with them, and Miss Carey was wild. Edmund didn't mind half as much.

She spoke to me as we was takin' a ride together one Sunday, when the snow had melted most off again. Guess it was early in December. She wanted her folks back in Orange, New Jersey, to buy new things and send 'em out. She was earnest about it. She was a nice-lookin' girl. I remember that ride. Tamaracks was all yello' and sheddin', makin' yello' patches on the snow with their needles, but the pines was that green they was black a little ways off, and the wind smelt of 'em strong.

"I wanted particularly to replace the glass decanter," she says, "but it only made him rude to me. I had to tell him it was a very strange thing that the only gentleman in the valley should be the one person who had been rude."

"Goodness to gracious!" I shouts out, "what did he say?"

"That I was the only lady in the valley, and that explained it."

"Well," I says, "he's never apologized as handsome as that to me." So we both laughs.

"But," she says just before we got home, "he ought not to tease those poor old men."

"Well, he's not done it lately — not in my hearin'," I says.

It happened Edmund had done it. Couldn't keep his mouth shut about the school-house question. It was the old men's duty, he claimed, to give their land for the school-house. Edmund was awful about people's duty. He brung it up, though, in a new way. He thought he was makin' a joke. Hands out the pieces of the decanter to Jake and Baldy, and tells 'em they done that damage and it was their business to make it good; so when they, who had never seen the decanter before, didn't make out what he was drivin' at, Edmund tells 'em they're the final cause. He explains how if they'd given their land, the school-house would have been built and no accidents would have occurred. Edmund meant that to be funny, but Jake and Baldy went off cursin' him and the school and the whole valley, and wasn't a bit grateful for learnin' what a final cause is.

But back they comes in a day or two as usual, as if no words had passed, and they buy their truck to go trappin'. Takes 'em all day, but Edmund is wonderful patient. So they can't start that day. So they comes back next day to pack up and start. And it was then that Washington, D.C., comes up again. The Siwash was a day

overdue with the mail, and some of the Texans was assembled at the store to see the mail arrive. They expected no letters, but it was somethin' to do and they always done it — assembled and stood around inside the store and out. Then to-day they had more to do, for there was Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy and their horses, packin' up their stuff. That gave everybody a chance to make remarks and be wise. They hardly noticed the mail when it did come about ten o'clock, they was so busy tellin' the old men the best way to do everythin' — best trap, best bait, best way to make a set — when Edmund he begins to lecture. He comes out with a letter in his hand and holds it up. That's the subject of the lecture. Letter has come to the wrong Beekman. It was mailed at Portland, Awregon, and addressed to "Beekman, Massachusetts," and it has come out of its way to "Beekman, Washington," thereby losin' a lot of time, of course. For it had went over the Northern Pacific on its right way as far as Spokane, and then had come back through Coulee City away up here, and it would get to Beekman, Massachusetts, about two weeks late.

"It all comes," says Edmund, "of havin' places

of the same name. That ought to be against the law." He told us there was nine Beekmans. He took it to heart heavy, as usual. "As the country grows and settles up," he says, "they'll keep on namin' places Beekman. There'll be a hundred Beekmans before we're through. It ought to be a state's prison offence."

"In that case," says a Texas parent, "you couldn't call this territory Washington."

"I guess this is a free country," says another.

"I guess," says another, "the folks that live in a place has the right to call that place what they see fit."

Poor Edmund! It wasn't no use him explainin' the confusion it made.

"There's forty-eight places named Washington now," says he. "I've looked it up. There ought to be just one. The capital of the United States. And the map is pitted with 'em like smallpox."

"Washington, D.C., Maryland," says Frisco Baldy, haulin' in slack on the diamond hitch.

"Virginia," says Kultus Jake, on the other side of the pack.

Edmund he just give 'em both a witherin' look, and he whirls back into the store and gets to work at his desk. Wouldn't come out to tell

the old men good-by when they started off up the river, although he was grubstakin' 'em for nothin'. They didn't know that, of course. Expected to pay him in furs when they come back in the spring.

"You'll not get very far to-day," says an onlooker to the departin' junipers. "You're makin' a late start."

"Camp at Early Winter," one of 'em says. Early Winter was a creek that come into the main stream about halfway to the Robinson Cabin.

"*Wake la-le hyas cole snass*," says the Siwash mail-carrier.

"Oh, no, it ain't," says a Texan, lookin' the weather up and down.

"Well, I think maybe it will," says another, sweepin' his eyes around the sky. "And maybe it won't."

So that sets 'em discussin' the probabilities of a big snow and if Siwashes knowed about such things more'n white men did. They concluded Siwashes was inferior to white men in every respect, and it wasn't goin' to snow.

"Good luck!" one of 'em calls out. But Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy was by that time on

the bridge over the North Fork, and couldn't hear him.

No more events took place that day. The kids finished their school and went home. Miss Carey she went home. Edmund opened the windows and swept the floor. A few folks bought things durin' the day, or came to buy and didn't, and some had letters to go out next day. There was always a little more hustle round mailtimes. But a lonesome winter softness filled the valley and seemed to make y'u hear the stove plainer. The trunks of the trees kind of appeared more silent. Everythin' was quieter. I remember Edmund looked out of the door about sundown and said the Siwash had been right, there was goin' to be a big snow. Even his voice sounded quieter in the clouded-over light, and Edmund's voice was always deep — the voice of a man who was all man. Lyin' in bed that night I never knowed the dark could be so still. Funny thing was, I heard the rapids under the bridge all of a sudden. Of course they'd been goin' right on all the time. What makes y'u notice things and not notice 'em? It got very solemn, that room did, in the dark. Those old men was too old to go off into the mountains. Then I heard the little

sound of the snowflakes around on the cabin. They must have started fallin' pretty late, for next mornin' it wasn't deep, not four inches yet, but it was keepin' on. Old man Parrigin come in about nine, and he says he had told everybody yesterday a storm was comin'. As a matter of fact, he'd been one of the surest no storm was comin'. It makes Edmund look sour at him. And bye and bye another prophet drops in, and he says he had offered to bet it would snow. And by eleven o'clock the fifth Texan had come along to sit around the stove; and he says — like every one of 'em had done before him — that anybody could have told it was goin' to snow. Oh, not one of 'em had ever doubted it for a minute! It gets too much for Edmund to bear, and he pushes up his spectacles high on his forehead and looks at me, mournful as anythin'.

"Last Fourth of July," says he to me, "I said it was going to snow to-day."

Old man Parrigin he starts laughin' at that. He come from New York state and he could see a joke, even when Edmund made it. But when y'u make that kind of a joke to a Texan — the kind of Texan that moves away from Texas — he says you're insultin' him. Around the stove they

all looks dignified and spits without words. We could hear the rapids, and indoors the kids was singin' some kind of Christmas chorus Miss Carey was teachin' to 'em. Their voices come to us through a couple of shut doors. One of the Texans as had been insulted by Edmund's joke now asserts his self-respect by changin' the subject.

"Washington, D.C.," says he, "is in Pennsylvania."

Edmund he sighs heavy and goes on postin' up his ledger.

Old man Parrigin gives me a nudge. "I wonder if Miss Carey would hold a night-school?" says he, and winks.

The fellars around the stove they spits some more. They was afraid. That's what was the matter. Plain it was there had been talk among 'em, ridin' away yesterday after Edmund's remarks. Maybe some of 'em knowed their geography correct on that point, but they didn't feel they knowed it correct enough to insist upon it in the presence of witnesses. Anyway they drops it now, and after some further spittin' they changes the subject again.

"There'll be plenty snow at the Robinson Cabin," says one.

"Plenty at Early Winter by now," another says.

"Oh, they'll get through," says a third.

"I wonder if they'll get my silver-gray fox," says old man Parrigin. So the talk turns for a while on trappin', and dies down till the rapids was the only noise; and then a Texan got up and stretched himself, and said he'd be late for dinner, he guessed, if he didn't begin to think some about startin' home. So he began to think, I suppose, though it didn't show none on his face. Edmund kep' a-writin' up his ledger. Y'u could hear the rapids just as if they had come clost up outside. And the snow was fallin' and fallin'.

Old man Parrigin holds up his hand. "What's that?" he says. So we all pricks up our ears.

The snow had the valley pretty well muffled, but there did seem to be somethin'. So a fellar looks out and he says it's somebody comin' acrost the bridge. Hard to tell who it was for the snow. But next minute he got nearer, and it was Frisco Baldy, walkin' his horse turrable slow.

"My God!" says somebody, "somethin's happened." And we all crowds out.

"More horses on the bridge," says Parrigin.

We could all see 'em. It was packhorses creepin' along. Behind 'em trailed a man ridin', and that was Kultus Jake.

"Then what has happened?" somebody says.

Baldy he arrives first, snow on his hat two inches deep. He gets down and jumps some to shake off the snow, and then walks in through us and goes to the stove and takes a chair. Not a word said. Packhorses they arrives and stands around all over snow — stand sad and hang-dog, like they was guilty and had gave up denyin' it. Jake comes along a mile an hour, same as Baldy; and he gets down and jumps the snow off, and same as Baldy, he passes through us and goes to the stove. But he puts it between him and Baldy. Sits down and don't look at Baldy. So we all comes back in and sits down, too —except Edmund. He goes behind his desk and stands up there with his spectacles pushed high.

"Well?" he says.

Baldy's lips move, but nothin' sounds.

"Well?" Edmund repeats. "Was the trail snowed up? Anybody dead?"

Jake clears his throat, but that's all.

Then Baldy manages to talk. "No," he says kind of croakin'; "trail wasn't snowed up."

"Not then, it wasn't," says Jake. "Nobody's dead."

Up flares Edmund's temper. He swings a big hammer down on the counter with a bang, and he lets out one swear as thorough and bad as any Western man. Y'u'd been scared yourself if he'd aimed it at you. After all, Edmund had grub-staked 'em, though they didn't know it.

The hammer and the oath dislodges Jake's voice. "That man," says he, noddin' contemptuous acrost the stove at Baldy — "that man claims it's in Maryland."

I have explained to y'u that Edmund was an unexpected person in his ways. I looked for more hammer and more blasphemy. They had let Washington, D.C., break up their winter's trappin'. But Edmund he slowly relaxes on the hammer, and he just stands and stands and keeps a-lookin' at 'em, merely inter-ested — more and more inter-ested. And they sits blinkin' at him. Won't look at each other.

Then a Texan speaks. "I have said right along that it was in Pennsylvania."

There's times when things get altogether beyond any daily feelin's a man commonly has. I didn't want to lay down on the flour sacks this

time. Didn't want to laugh at all. And Edmund wasn't a bit mad. Even old man Parrigin makes no symptoms except of further inquiry. And the Texans, of course, was merely anxious to have a point settled that some of 'em had been disputin' over.

"I wish you would tell me all about it," says Edmund. Violets ain't milder than he was.

Well, that was exactly what they couldn't do, y'u see. When they first come in and saw how we was all anxious over watchin' 'em arrive I expect it came home to 'em, I expect it shamed 'em. They took in then the way they and their actions would look to the valley, and talkin' came hard to 'em. But once they got started, they was soon screechin' at each other as usual, and forgot appearances. They had got to Early Winter, they had camped at Early Winter, but on the way there the argument had come up. Must have growed pretty warm by bedtime, for it had lasted through their sleep so they wasn't speakin' to each other at breakfast. Y'u see, alone up there with the snow there wasn't nothin' new to change the subject for 'em. It stayed right with 'em, and after breakfast it bruck out worse than ever, Jake for Virginia and Baldy for Maryland,

and they had it all the time they was packin', givin' each other proofs where it was; and when they was ready to go they wouldn't live with each other any more, wouldn't camp, wouldn't trap, wouldn't speak — and so they had come home!

So there they was, and there we was, and there it was. They'd simmered down again now, after tearin' loose and tellin' all about it. They was quiet. They sat with the stove between 'em and just blinked on and on. Snow fallin'; rapids soundin'; nothin' else durin' it must have been all of a minute — and it felt like ten.

The strain got too severe for that Texan, and he spoke with the gentlest, anxiousest voice, like a child pleadin' for somethin': —

"Say, ain't it in Pennsylvania?"

And outside in the snow one o' them horses gives a long, weary, hungry neigh.

That horse breakin' in bust somethin' inside of me and Parrigin and Edmund. Edmund he gives a kind of youp! Parrigin curls over on the counter, and I'd have laid right down on the sacks, only I wasn't near 'em, and so I leaned up against the shelves. Nobody else did nothin' because Jake and Baldy hadn't any heart left after seein' themselves in their true light, and the other

Texans they was bein' very careful now about their geography—they were savin' it up, they wasn't givin' any of it away, not even to charity.

But after his youp Edmund pulls himself up and he takes charge of the meetin', and when me and Parrigin hears him beginnin' a speech we comes to and listens.

"This is a great valley," says Edmund, behind his desk. "It has song and story whipped to a finish." Then he fixes his big glum eyes on Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy. "Don't think," says he, "you'll draw me into your argument. But you hold the record. Wherever Washington is, it would have stayed there till spring. Your words haven't moved it anywhere else. But you have lost your winter over this. Couldn't you have waited and come home with your load of furs, and been a success instead of a failure? For you can't turn around and go back into the mountains now; you'd never get halfway, and unless unusual weather follows this soon, the passes will be choked for the next three months."

Edmund stops with that. It was fairly hard on the poor old blinkin' junipers—but y'u'll notice Edmund hadn't told 'em a word about the grubstakin'. "If everybody will come in here,"

he says, "perhaps we can find some child to settle the question."

He opens the door and we all shambles in through after him to the school-room. Miss Carey she rises from her chair, and of course she don't know what to make of it.

"Miss Carey," says Edmund, "will some of your scholars kindly tell us what the capital of the United States is, and where it is?"

Miss Carey she looks at the kids sittin' around the table fixed for 'em. Gosh, y'u'd ought to have seen the hands fly up all over the room!

"Everybody may answer," says Miss Carey.

And out they yells it. It was like the chorus they was practisin' for Christmas. Oh, she had 'em trained!

There was long breaths of relief drawn among the men standin' sheepish by the door — two or three regular sighs come out from that crowd.

"Thank you, Miss Carey," says Edmund, "and please excuse us for troubling you." So he leads the way back into the store and goes behind his desk. If anybody expected him to make another speech they was disappointed. Edmund looked cold and ca'm, and just as unconcerned as though

he'd been addin' sums or readin' a two-weeks-old newspaper. He starts writin' at his ledger.

"Well, I'll be late for dinner," says the Texan.

"I told y'u where it was," says another.

One by one they shuffles out, Jake and Baldy mixed in with them, and they swings up on to their horses and slowly goes away — up the river and down the river and acrost the bridge — till y'u could see none of em no more through the fallin' snow; and in the store was just Edmund writin', and me lookin' at him, and the sound of the rapids.

Did Edmund talk then? That wouldn't have been Edmund. Nothin' was said in that store by him or me for — well, it must have been quite a while before the door opened and Miss Carey she pokes her head in and wants to know if she may be so bold as to inquire what all that meant in the school-room. The kids had gone home early for fear of the snow. So Edmund he smiles perfectly peaceful and tells her about it. So, of course, she thinks it very comic and she laughs hearty — but all of a sudden she remembers and expresses sympathy for Edmund's misplaced generosity.

"Don't let that trouble you," says he, gay

enough. "I meant to grubstake 'em, and I will. It shall not cost 'em a cent. Don't tell the poor old idiots."

So that was that. But the poor old idiots had somethin' more to say. They had a thought. It snowed away all that night — a great big snow — but next mornin' it had quit and there was promise of its turnin' into a fine large day. The kids had come to school pretty late, but they come. And then into the store walks Kultus Jake and Frisco Baldy. For a while they walks around and just inspects all the goods they knowed by heart anyway.

"Well?" says Edmund. And they looks at each other.

"Could we step into the school-room just a minute?" says Jake then.

Edmund he looks surprised, but asks no questions, and in we all goes. Miss Carey she gets up again.

"Any more information?" says she, pleasant.

"No," says Jake.

"Not to-day," says Baldy.

"We," says Jake, "well — we — we'd —"

Baldy gets restless and he steps up. "Put your school-house on our land," says he.

"We want to give it to y'u," says Baldy.

"Coal and all," says Jake.

There was a pink color went over Miss Carey's face — all over it — and she didn't say a word for a while; she looks quick at Edmund and then she looks back at the two old men, and her eyes has tears in 'em.

"Folks ought to know geography," says Jake.

"We want the kids in this valley to know it," says Baldy.

"Knowledge will save 'em from mistakes," says Jake.

And then Miss Carey she speaks at last. "Thank you," she says.

"Is this *potlatch?*" inquires Edmund, jokin'.

"*Kultus potlatch!*" says both of 'em together.

Would y'u think it? — after that day I never heard 'em scrappin' together again. Maybe they did sometimes, but not in my hearin'. Their experience seemed to have changed 'em somehow. In the store I'd catch 'em lookin' at each other. Their eyes was gentle. I think — yes, I think they knowed that it was coming, that good-by was on its way to them. The schoolhouse was built in the spring; and after the school got into it, now and again Jake and

Baldy would sneak up to the door, look in and take a back seat. And one of 'em would say he'd like to ask the kids a question: Where was Washington, D.C.? And when the answer came, Jake and Baldy they'd laugh like they'd split and sneak out again. One day in the store we heard the knockin' sound of a boat bein' rowed over the river, and Baldy came into the store alone. He walks to Edmund, but he looks down on the floor.

"Jake's sick," says he. "Jake's sick." Oh, he knowed what it meant.

There was no doctor in the valley, but what could a doctor do? In about three days we had Baldy sick, too. The tie between 'em was the tie of life, and Jake died of a Saturday and Baldy died Monday.

"They must be buried by the school-house," says Miss Carey. And everybody went. And then up comes the question what to put on the headboard? It brought up something none of us had thought of.

"Why, we don't even know their names!" says Miss Carey, very soft.

We didn't know anything. They had come into the valley, they had made the valley laugh,

they were gone. That was all. Not a fact or a birthplace or anythin' to put over them that would tell who they had been. But Miss Carey wasn't goin' to let it be like that. She took it in charge and she got it right. She found a bit of poetry and she had the board painted, and it was this way: "Jake and Baldy. Our Friends. Their heart was free from malice, and all their anger was excess of love."

And then along in July Edmund got married to Miss Carey. They was sure a happy two!

"Are y'u still the oldest man in the valley?" I asks Edmund one day in the store.

"About three and a half," says Edmund, solemn and deep. But then he laughs.

Oh, yes, their happiness filled that store, filled the whole cabin, crowded it. Maybe that's why I left the valley.

VIII

THE DRAKE WHO HAD MEANS OF HIS OWN

Scipio sat beside the table — Mrs. Culloden's still very new, wedding-present table — arguing on and on, and I forgot all about him. When he slapped the Wyoming game laws for that year down on the table hard, and complained that I was not listening to him, I continued to look out of the ranch window at the pond and merely said: —

"Just hear those ducks."

He stared at me with disgust and scorn. "Ducks!" he then muttered.

"Well, but hear them," I urged.

"Well, they're quackin'," he said. "A duck does." He picked up the game laws and resumed: "As I was telling you, it says — page 12, section 25 —"

But I gave him no attention and still looked out at the pond.

So then he remarked bitterly: "I suppose ducks crow back East — or bark."

He was perfectly welcome to all the satire he could invent; I was not to be turned from my curiosity about the clamor in the water outside, and as I watched I said aloud: "There's something behind it."

This brought him to the window, where, as he stood silent beside me, I could feel his impatience as definitely as if it had been a radiator. The matter was that he had his mind running on something and I had my mind running on something — and they weren't the same things; and each of us wished the other to be interested in his own thing.

"Something behind it," echoed Scipio slightingly. "Behind every quack you'll find a duck."

To this I returned no answer.

"Maybe they have forgot themselves and laid eggs in the water," suggested Scipio.

"Do your Western ducks lay much in September?" I inquired, with chill.

The noise in the pond, which had died down for an instant, was now set up again — loud, remonstrant, voluble; the two birds sat in the middle of the water and lifted up their heads and screamed to the sky.

"That's what they've done," said Scipio; "and

they can't locate the eggs. Well, it'd make me holler too. Say," he pleaded, "what's the point in your point, anyhow? I want to show you about those game laws."

"Must I hear it all over again and must I say it all over again?" I responded, not taking my eye from the pond.

"You've never heard it wunst yet, for you've never listened."

"I did. I didn't begin to wander till you began repeating the whole thing for the third time. And now I'll say, for the fourth time, it's a close season till 1912. There they go out of the pond, single file — Duchess in the lead. The Duchess has purple in her wings; the Countess has none."

"Oh, soap fat!" said Scipio.

"And they've gone to feed on the grain in the haystack. There's Sir Francis waiting for them by the woodpile. He's the drake."

"Oh, soap fat!" repeated Scipio.

I followed the ducks until they had waddled out of sight.

"Every now and then, during the day," I said, "they go through that same performance: sit in the water and scream louder each minute, then

come out and head for the haystack in the most orderly, quiet manner, just after having given every symptom of falling into convulsions. Now I'm going to find out what that means. And what I am wondering at," I continued, "is why you do not suggest that they are screaming at the game laws."

Well, we sat down then and had it out about those game laws; and it is but right to confess that they were more important to poor Scipio than the ducks were to me. First we took section 25 to pieces, dug its sentences to the bottom, and carefully lifted out every scrap which gave promise of containing sense. It was no child's task. You didn't reach the first full stop for a hundred and twelve words — nothing but commas; it was like being lost in the sage-brush — and, by the time the full stop did come, your head — but let me quote the sentence: —

"It shall be unlawful for any person or persons to kill any antelope until the open season for other game animals in 1915, when only one antelope may be killed by any person hunting legally, or to kill any moose, elk or mountain sheep until the open season for other game animals, in 1912, when only one male moose may be killed by any

person hunting legally, or to kill any elk or mountain sheep in any part of this state, except in Fremont County, Uinta County, Carbon County and that part of Bighorn County and Park County west of the Bighorn River, until the open season for game animals in 1915."

To tell you all that we said before we had finished with this would be worse than useless — it would be profane; enough that I stuck to the conclusion I had reached when I read the section in the East — no hunting anything anywhere for anybody until 1912. On the strength of it I had left my rifle at home and brought only my fishing rod.

"If it is your way," said Scipio, "what do you make of section 26? 'It shall be unlawful for any person or persons to hunt, pursue or kill any elk, deer or mountain sheep except from September twenty-fifth to November thirtieth of *each year*.'" He yelled the last two words at me.

But I merely clapped my hands to my brow.

"And if it is your way," Scipio pursued, playing his ace, "what do you make of Honey Wiggin taking a party out next Monday for six weeks?"

"Why, they'll simply all be arrested."

"No; they'll not. I've saw Honey's license with this year stamped in red figures right acrost it, just as plain as headlines."

What could one reply to that? I picked up the pamphlet and stared at the page.

Scipio ruminated. "Will you tell me," he said, "why, in a country where everybody's born equal, the legislature should be a bigger fool than anybody else?"

"It's a free country," I reminded him. "Every man has the right to be an ass here."

But Scipio still brooded. "Well," he said, "if I was a legislator—" he stopped.

"You're not qualified," said I.

"Not?"

"You haven't sufficient command of the English language."

"*What!*" cried Scipio; for vocabulary is his chief pride and I had actually touched him.

"No. You couldn't cook up two paragraphs of your mother tongue that would defy any sane human intelligence."

"They have done worse than that to me," he said ruefully. "They have lost me my season's job. The party I was to take out read them laws same as you did, and they stayed back East and

made other plans. That's what I got in last night's mail."

"Well, I haven't stayed back East," I said. "The fishing's about done, but I want an excuse for another month or two of outing. My things can get here in twelve days — we'll hunt, and I'll be your season's job. And," I added, "now I shall have time to study the ducks."

We launched then into discussion of horses and camp outfit, copiously arguing what the legislature would let a man hunt, pursue, or kill in a season it declared to be open for no big game at all, until from eleven the clock went round to noon; and in the kitchen the voice of Mrs. Culloden was heard, calling clearly to her young bridegroom in the corral — calling too clearly.

"Well, Jimsy," the voice said, "are you going to get me any wood for this stove — or ain't you?"

Our discussion dropped; we sat still; it was time for Scipio to be getting back across the river to his own cabin and dinner. He rose, put on his hat, and stood looking at me for a moment. Then he took his hat off and scratched his head, glancing toward the kitchen.

"Jimsy, did you hear me telling you about that wood?" came the voice of the young bride, a

trifle clearer. "I seem to have to remind you of everything."

Scipio's bleached blue eye and his long, eccentric nose turned slowly once more on me. "My, but it's turrable easy to get married," was his word. He shoved his hat on again and was out of the door and on his horse; and I watched him ride down to the river and ford it. As he grew distant, my three ducks waddled back from the haystack to the pond. The Duchess led, the Countess followed; Sir Francis brought up the rear. But how could I attend to them while the following reached me through the door from the kitchen?

"If dinner's late you can thank yourself, Jimsy."

"Why, May, I split the wood for you right after breakfast. That corral gate —"

"Split the wood and leave me to carry it!"

"Well, I've been about as busy as I could be on the ditch; and that gate needs —"

"Never mind. Wash your hands and get ready now. Kiss me first."

At this point it seemed best to go out of the sitting-room door and come presently into the kitchen by the other way, at the moment when my hostess was placing the hot food upon the

table. It was good food, well cooked; and all the spoons and things were bright and clean. Bright and clean too, and very pretty, was the little bride. She was not twenty yet; Jimsy was not twenty-four; and as he sat down to his meal I saw her look at him with a look which I understood plainly: had no stranger been there to see, some more kissing would have occurred. Yet, what did she now find to say to him — she that so visibly adored him?

"Jimsy Culloden! Well, I guess you'll never learn to brush your hair!"

Jimsy suddenly grinned. "Others have enjoyed it pretty well this way," said he. "Tangled their hands all through it." And his gray eyes twinkled at me. But the little woman's blue eyes flashed and she sat up very stiff. "Before I asked you, that was," Jimsy added.

Have I ever told you how Jimsy became married? I believe not — but it would take too long now; it will have to wait. His bachelor liveliness had not contributed to his mother's peace of mind, but all was now well; the poker chips had gone I don't know where; our beloved old card-table of past years stood now in the bridal bedroom, stifled in feminine drapery beyond recog-

"My, but it's turrable easy to get married"

nition; the bottles that in these days lay empty beyond the corral had contained merely tomato ketchup and such things; and here was Jimsy Culloden a stable citizen, an anchored man, county commissioner, selling vegetables, alfalfa, and horses, with me for a paying boarder in that new-established Wyoming industry which is locally termed dude-wrangling. The eastern "dude" is destined to replace Hereford cattle in Wyoming — and sheep also.

Jimsy was an anchored man, to be sure: might he possibly some day drag his anchor? I glanced at his blue-eyed May, so fair and competent, and I hoped her voice would not grow much clearer. I glanced at Jimsy, quietly eating, and wondered if a new look lately lurking in his eye — a look of slight bewilderment — would increase or pass.

"Didn't I see Scipio Le Moyne ride away?" he asked me.

"Yes. It was dinner-time."

"Couldn't he stay here and eat?"

"There you go, Jimsy Culloden; wanting to feed this whole valley every day, just like you was rich!"

Jimsy's gray eyes blinked and he attended to his plate. The failure of that little joke about

tangled hair was the probable cause of his present silence, and the bride appealed to me.

"Ain't that so?" she said. "You've been here before. You know how folks loaf around up and down this valley and stop to dinner, and stay for supper, and just eat people up!"

She was so perfectly right in principle that my only refuge from the perilous error of taking sides was the somewhat lame remark: "Well, Scipio isn't a dead-beat, you know."

"There!" cried Jimsy, triumphantly.

"Mr. Culloden would have fed a dead-beat just the same," returned the lady promptly.

Again she was entirely right. From good heart and long habit Jimsy made welcome every passing traveler and his horse. When Wyoming was young and its ranches lay wide, desert miles apart, such hospitality was the natural, unwritten law; but now, in this day of increasing settlements and of rainbowed folders of railroads painting a promised land for all comers, a young ranchman could easily be kept poor by the perpetual drain on his groceries and his oats. Jimsy's wife was stepping between him and his bachelor shiftlessness in all directions, and the propitious signs of her influence were everywhere. Indoors

and out, a crisp, new appearance of things harbingered good fortune. Why, she had actually started him on reforming his gates! Did you ever see the thing they were frequently satisfied to call a gate in Wyoming? A sordid wreck of barbed wire and rotten wood, hung across the fence-gap by a rusty loop, raggedly dangling like the ribs of a broken umbrella.

The telephone bell called Mrs. Culloden to the sitting-room near the end of dinner.

Mrs Sedlaw, her dear friend and schoolmate living five miles up the valley, was inviting them to dinner next day to eat roast grouse.

"Let's go," said Jimsy.

"And you quit your ditch and me quit my ironing?" answered the clear voice. "Thank you ever so much, Susie; we'd just love to, but Jimsy can't go off the ranch this week and I'd not like to leave him all alone, even if I wasn't as busy as I can be with our wash." There followed exchange of gossip and laughter over it, and much love sent to and fro — and the receiver was hung up.

"As for grouse," I said to Jimsy, for his silence was on my nerves, "I will now go and catch you some trout superior to any bird that flies."

Sir Francis, the snow-white drake, stood by the woodpile as I crossed the enclosure on my way to the river. In the pond the lady ducks were loudly quacking, but I passed them by. I desired the solitude of Buffalo Horn, its pools, its cottonwoods, its quiet presiding mountains; and I walked up its stream for a mile, safe from that clear voice and from the bewildered eye of Jimsy, my once blithe, careless friend.

Unless it be from respect for Izaak Walton and tradition, I know not why I ever carry in my fly-book, or ever use, a brown-hackle; it has wasted hours of fishing time for me. The hours this afternoon it did not waste, because, under the spell of the large day that shone upon the valley, my thoughts dwelt not on fish, but with delicious vagueness upon matrimony, the game laws and those ducks. With the waters of Buffalo Horn talking near by and singing far off, I watched all things rather than my line and often wholly stopped to smell the wild, clean odor of the sage-brush and draw the beauty of everything into my very depths. So from pool to pool I waded down the south fork of Buffalo Horn and had caught nothing when I reached Sheep Creek, by Scipio's ranch. Here I changed to a grizzly king and soon had killed four trout.

Scipio was out in his meadow gathering horses, and he came to the bank with a question: —

"Find the eggs them ducks laid in the water?"

"Jimsy wanted to know why you didn't stay to dinner," was my answer.

"Huh!" Scipio watched me land a half-pound fish. Then: "They ain't been married a year yet."

I cast below a sunken log and took a small trout, which I threw back, while Scipio resumed:

"Why I didn't stop to dinner! Huh! Say, when did they quit havin' several wives at wunst?"

"Who quit?"

"Why, them sheep-men back in the Bible — Laban and Solomon and them old-timers. What made 'em quit?"

"They didn't all quit. There, you've made me lose that fish. Are you thinking two wives would be twice as bad as one?"

"You'll get another fish. I'm thinking they wouldn't be half as bad as one."

Certain passages in Scipio's earlier days came into my mind, but I did not mention them to him. Possibly he was thinking of them himself.

"Two at once is not considered moral in this country," I said.

Scipio mused. "I'm not sure I've ever clearly understood about morals," he muttered. "Are you going to keep that whitefish?"

"I always keep a few for the hens. Makes 'em lay."

This caused Scipio to look frowningly across Buffalo Horn to where the Culloden Ranch buildings lay clear in the blue crystal of the afternoon light. "Marriage ain't learned in a day," he remarked, "any more than ropin' stock is. He ain't learned how to *be* married yet."

Again I thought of Scipio's past adventures and remembered that the best critics are they who have failed in art.

"Did you mean what you said about hunting with me?" Scipio now inquired.

"Sure thing!" I returned, "if you're right about Honey Wiggin."

"Oh, I'm right enough. You'll see him come by here Monday."

"Then I'll send East for my things," I said.

"Well, I'll be looking for a man to cook and horse-wrangle," said Scipio.

As I approached the ranch across the level pasture with my fish, I could hear from afar the quack of the ducks, invisible in the pond, and

could see from afar the snow-white figure of the drake, stationary by the woodpile. Now for the first time the idea glimmered upon me that he had something to do with it. But what? I came to the breast of the little pond and stood upon it to watch the Countess and the Duchess. They were making a great noise; but over what? Sometimes they sat still and screamed together; a punctuation of silence would then follow. Next one or the other would take it up alone. Was it a sort of service they were holding to celebrate the sunset? I looked up at the lustrous crimson on the mountain wall — a mile of giant battlements sending forth a rose glow as if from within, like something in a legend; birds and beasts might well celebrate such a marvel — but the Countess and Duchess were doing this at other hours, when nothing particular seemed to be happening. I looked at the drake by the woodpile. He had not moved a quarter of an inch. He stood in profile, most becomingly. His neat, spotless white, his lemon-colored bill, his orange-colored legs, his benign yet confident attitude, as if of personal achievement taken for granted but not thrust forward — all this put me in mind of something, but so faintly that I could

not just then make out what it was. Shouts from the Duchess at the top of her voice hastily recalled my attention to the pond.

I expected to find something sudden was wrong. Not at all. The water was without a wrinkle, the ducks floated motionless: yet there had been a note, a quality, urgent, piercingly remonstrant, in those quacks of the Duchess. She might have been calling for the constabulary, the fire brigade, and the health department. And then, without change for better or for worse in anything around us that I could see, the two birds swam placidly to land. They got out on the bank, wiggled their tails, stood on their toes to flap their wings, and, this brief drying process being over, they took their way to the drake. He stood by the woodpile, stock-still in profile; he had not yet moved a quarter of an inch; it seemed to me — but I was not certain — that his ladies raced as they drew near him. When they reached him he turned with gravity and headed for the haystack. They fell in behind him and the three waddled and wobbled solemnly toward their goal, squeezed under the fence and were lost to view.

I took in my trout to Mrs. Culloden, who praised their size and my skill. On the subject

of giving her hens a diet of whitefish, she told me it was her great ambition so to manage that before the moulting fowls should wholly stop laying the spring pullets should have begun to lay.

"Jimsy is real fond of eggs," she explained, "and I want him to have them."

I further learned that whitefish cooked were better than whitefish raw, which often tainted the eggs with a fishy taste. I stood high in the little bride's favor because I was helping her to please Jimsy. Lying abed that night in my one-room cabin, I said aloud, abruptly: "That was a protest."

I know nothing about what they call our subconscious workings, save that I am choke-full of them; I meant the Duchess. Apparently my subconscious works had been dealing with her ever since the scene at the pond. Thus a conclusion had popped out of my mouth full-fledged before I knew it was there. "Yes," I repeated; "she was protesting. They both were."

The works, however, must have stopped after that for the night — or turned to other activity — for next morning I went down to the pond with nothing beyond the two theories of yesterday: that it was protest and that the drake was some-

how at the bottom of it. But I scored no advance in my knowledge. All three birds were in the water and did not come out while I remained there; nothing more of their plan of life was revealed to me. Still, I saw one new thing. Sir Francis swam about, with the Duchess and Countess in a suite, following close, but never crowding him. What they did do was crowd each other. A struggle for place occurred between them from time to time; and, although all the rest of the time they were like sisters, when the struggle was on it was bitter.

I must have stayed watching them for half an hour to make sure of this and I know that there were moments when they would have gladly killed each other. Sir Francis never took the slightest notice of it, though he must have been well aware of it, since it always went on some six inches behind his back. The Countess would attempt to swim up closer to him, at which the Duchess would instantly crook her neck sidewise at her and, savagely undulating her head, would utter quick, poisonous sounds that trembled with fury. To these the Countess would retort, crooking and undulating too; thus they would swim with their necks at right angles,

raging at each other and crowding for place. Sometimes the Duchess darted her bill out and bit the Countess, who was of a milder nature, I gradually discerned. The admirable ignorance which Sir Francis preserved of all this testified plainly to his moral balance, and filled me with curiosity and respect. Whatever was going on behind him, whether peace or war, he swam quietly on or stopped as it pleased him, with never a change in the urbanity of his eye and carriage.

It came to me that afternoon what his attitude at the woodpile essentially was. He stood there again alone — the ducks were quacking in the pond — and as I looked at his neat white body and the lemon-colored bill and orange-colored legs, all presented in the same dignified profile, I saw that his was by instinct the historical portrait attitude: Perry after Lake Erie, Webster before replying to Hayne, Washington on being notified of his appointment as Commander-in-Chief — you will understand what I mean. And if you smile at my absorption in these little straws from the farmyard you have never known the blessing of true leisure. To drop clean out of my mind for a while the law and

investment of trust funds and the self-induced hysterics of Wall Street, and study a perfectly irrelevant, unuseful trifle, such as the family life of Sir Francis and his ladies, brings a pastoral health to the spirit and to the biliary duct.

There was an error in my conclusions about the Countess and Duchess which I did not have a chance to perceive for a day or two, because our domestic harmony was mysteriously disturbed. That clear note in May's voice waked up again, this time a tone or so higher; and it was kept awake by one thing after another. It began after a wagonful of people had passed the ranch on its way down the valley to town. I was off by the river when they stopped a few minutes on the road outside the fence. One could not see who they were at that distance. Jimsy left his ditch work and talked to them and when they had gone returned to it. At our next meal Jimsy's eye was bewildered — and something more — and May's voice was bad for digestion. As soon as my last mouthful was swallowed I sought the solitude of my cabin and read a book until bedtime. How should one connect that wagonload of people with the new and higher tide of unrest? Nothing was more the custom than this stopping

"Well, Jimsy, are you going to get me any wood for this stove — or ain't you?"

of neighbors to chat over the fence. May's voice and Jimsy's eye kept me as often and as far from their neighborhood as I could get.

It was Scipio, the next time I saw him, who began at once: "Did you see Mrs. Faxon?"

"Who's she?"

"Gracious! I thought everybody in this country knowed her. She's an alfalfa widow."

"Well, I seem to have somehow missed her."

"She went down to town the other day. Pity you've missed her. Awful good-looker."

"Well, I'll try to meet her."

"Her and Jimsy used to meet a whole heap," said Scipio.

"Oh!" said I. "H'm! All the same May's a fool."

"Did she get mad? Did she get mad?" demanded Scipio, vivaciously.

"Lord!" said I, thinking of it. I told Scipio how Jimsy had talked over the fence to the scarlet fragment of his past for perhaps three minutes in the safe presence of a wagonload of witnesses, and how in consequence May had gone up into the air. "To love acceptably needs tact," I moralized; but while I expatiated on this, Scipio's attention wandered.

"You saw Honey Wiggin go up the river with his dudes?"

"Oh, yes."

"And two other parties go up?"

"Yes."

"Any further notions about the game laws?"

"Nothing — except it's the merest charity to assume they made them when they were drunk."

"Sure thing! I guess I'll have a cook when your camping stuff comes."

My stuff was due in not many days; and as I walked home from Scipio's cabin I felt gratitude to the game laws for the part they had played in delaying me in this valley. where each day seemed the essence distilled from the beauty of seven usual days. Even as I waded Buffalo Horn I stopped to look up and down the course that it made between its bordering cottonwoods. A week ago these had been green; but autumn had come one night and now here was Buffalo Horn unwinding its golden miles between the castle walls of the mountains. Amid all this august serenity I walked the slower through fear of having it marred by the voice of May. I lingered outside the house and it was the voice of the Duchess that I heard. Yes, I was grateful to the

game laws. They, too, caused me to learn the whole truth about Sir Francis.

On this particular evening I saw where had been my error regarding the Countess and Duchess. I have spoken of the Countess' milder nature, which I thought always put her behind the Duchess in their struggle for precedence. It did not. Quite often she made up in skill what she lacked in force and I now saw the first example of it. They were all coming to the pond for their evening swim, the two ducks scolding and walking with their necks at right angles. Sir Francis was in the lead, his head gently inclined toward the water. As he got in the Duchess made an evident miscalculation. She thought he was going to swim to the right, and she splashed hastily in that direction. But he swam to the left. The Countess was there in a flash. She got herself next to him and held her place round and round the pond, crooking her neck and quacking backward at the enraged, defeated Duchess.

Twice in the following forenoon I saw this recur; and before supper I knew that it was a part of their daily lives. Sometimes it happened on land, sometimes in the water, and always in the same way — a miscalculation as to which way

the drake was going to turn. It was the duck who had been nearest to him that always made the miscalculation, and she invariably lost her place by it. Then she would rage in the rear while the other scoffed back at her. Neither of them could have been entirely a lady or they would have known how to conduct their quarrel without all this displeasing publicity. But there can be no doubt that Sir Francis was a perfect gentleman. Not only was he never aware of what was happening, but he so bore himself as wholly to avoid being made ridiculous. That the Duchess was a little near-sighted I learned when I took to feeding them with toast brought from breakfast.

My time was growing short and I began to fear that I might be gone hunting before I had penetrated the mystery of the historical portrait attitude near the woodpile and the protests of the ducks in the water. This was going on straight along, only I had never managed to see the beginning of it. Therefore I fed them on toast to draw closer to them, and I tried to give each a piece, turn about; but only too often, when toast meant for the Duchess had fallen in the water directly under her nose, she would peer helplessly

about and the Countess would dip down quickly and get it. Sometimes the Duchess saw it one second too late, when their heads would literally collide, and the Duchess, under the impression she had got it, would snap her bill two or three times on nothing, and then perceive the Countess chewing the morsel. At this she always savagely bit the Countess; and still, through it all, the drake sustained his admirable ignorance. My feeding device triumphed. I did learn about the woodpile.

This is what I saw. They had been swimming for a while after eating the toast. Sir Francis had finally swallowed a last hard bit of crust after repeatedly soaking it in the water. He looked about and evidently decided it was time for the haystack. He got out on the bank, but the ladies did not. He turned and looked at them; they continued swimming. Then he walked slowly away in silence, and as he grew distant their swimming became agitated. Reaching the woodpile, he turned and stood in bland, eminent profile. Then the ducks in the pond began. The Duchess quacked; the Countess quacked; their voices rose and became positively wild. A person who did not know would have hastened to

see if they needed assistance. This performance lasted four minutes by my watch — the drake statuesque by the woodpile, the ducks screaming in the water. Then, as I have before described, they succumbed to the power at the woodpile. They swam ashore, flapped to dry themselves, and made for Sir Francis like people catching a train. He did not move until they had reached him, when all sought the haystack.

So now I understood clearly that it was he who made their plans, timed all their comings and goings, and that they, bitterly as they disliked leaving the water until they were ready, nevertheless had to leave it when he was ready. Of course, if either of them had had any real mind, they would have realized long before that it was of no use to attempt to cope with him and they would have got out quickly when he did, instead of making this scene several times every day. But why did they get out at all when they didn't want to? Why didn't they let him go to the haystack by himself? What was the secret of his power? It was they who were always fighting and biting; his serenity was flawless.

I stood on the breast of the pond, turning this over. If you have outrun me and arrived at the

truth, it just shows once again how superior readers are to writers in intelligence. I was not destined to fathom it. Many a problem has taken two to solve it and it was Jimsy who — but let that wait. Jimsy came across from the stable and spoke to me now: —

"What are you studying?"

"I have been studying your ducks."

He looked over at the cabin, where May could be seen moving about in the kitchen, and I saw his face grow suddenly tender. "They're hers," he said softly. "She kind o' wanted ducks round here and so one day I brought 'em to her from town. Then I made this pond for 'em — just dammed the creek across this little gully. Nothing's wrong with 'em?"

"Oh, no. But they've set me guessing."

He did not believe my story, though he listened with his gray eyes fixed on mine. "That's wonderful," he said; "but you've made it up. I'd have noticed a thing like that."

"I don't think you would. You're working all day with your stock and your ditches. Think what a loafer I am."

"It's most too extraordinary," he said, and stood looking at the woodpile. He was not really

thinking about what I had told him; I could feel that.

"Well, Jimsy!"

We both started a little. It was May, who had come round the corner of the house, and the setting sun shone upon her and made her quite lovely, where she stood shading her eyes, with a little hair floating one side of her forehead.

"Well, Jimsy! Dreaming again! Do you know what time it is? The way you've took to dreaming is something terrible!"

Jimsy went into the house.

I was glad that two days more would see me out of this.

Next morning I stood justified — oh, more than justified — in Jimsy's eyes. No one could have anticipated such a performance at the pond as I was able to show him — it bore me out and surpassed anything I had told him — and no one could have foretold that it would fire Jimsy with a curiosity equal to mine.

The ceremony of the toast was in progress when Jimsy, crossing to the corral, saw me thus engaged. He stuck his hands into his pockets and strolled across to the water's edge, wearing a broad grin of indulgence.

"Awful busy, you are!" said he.

"Just watch them," said I.

"Oh, I've got a day's work to do."

"I'm aware," I retorted, "that scientific observation doesn't look like work to the ignorant."

"What're you trying to find out?"

"I told you last night. I can't see how that drake keeps those ducks in order."

"Oh, I guess he don't keep 'em in order."

"I tell you he has them under his thumb."

Jimsy cast a careless eye upon the birds. They had finished the toast and were swimming about. The quacks of the Duchess were merely quacks to him; he did not hear that she was saying to the Countess: "Hah, Hah, Hah! How do you fancy a back seat this morning?"

"One feels mortified, of course," I explained to Jimsy, "that she should betray her spite so crudely—a sad but common thing in our country."

"In the name of God, what are you talking about?" demanded Jimsy.

"Oh, I'm not in the least crazy. New York stinks with people like that."

At this moment the usual thing happened in the pond—the Duchess made a miscalculation.

The drake swam suddenly left instead of right, and the Countess jumped to the favored place. Now it was she who quacked backward at her discountenanced rival.

"She is really the sweeter nature of the two," I said. But Jimsy was attending to the ducks with an awakened interest; in fact, he was now caught in the same fascination that had held me for so many days. He took his hands out of his pockets and followed the ducks keenly.

"I believe you weren't lyin' to me," he remarked presently.

"You wait! Just you wait!" I exclaimed.

He watched a little longer. "D'you suppose," he said, "it's his feathers they love so?"

"His feathers?" I repeated.

"Those two curly ones in his tail. They're crooked plumb enticing, like they were saying, 'Come, girls!'"

This reminded me of Jimsy's unbrushed mound of hair and May's coldness at his reference to it. "Feathers would hardly account for everything," I said.

A last spark of doubt flickered in Jimsy. "Are you joshing about this thing?" he asked.

"Just you wait," I said again.

We did not have to wait. In the judgment of the drake it was time for the haystack; the ducks thought it too soon. All began as usual. Sir Francis had reached the woodpile and taken his attitude, the first protesting scream from the pond had risen to the sky, Jimsy's face was causing me acute pleasure, when the Duchess did an entirely new thing. She swam to the inlet and began to waddle slowly up the trickling stream. Then I perceived a few yards beyond her the cleanings of some fish which had been thrown out. It was for these she was making.

"She has ruined everything!" I lamented.

"Wait!" said Jimsy. He whispered it. His new faith was completer than mine.

The Duchess heavily proceeded. In my childhood I used sometimes to see old ladies walking slowly, shod in soft, wide, heelless things made of silk or satin — certainly not of leather, except the soles — which seem to have gone out. The Duchess trod as if she had these same mid-Victorian feet and she began gobbling the fish. If this was any strain upon the drake, he did not show it. The Countess now discerned from the pond what the Duchess was doing and she was instantly riven with contending emotions. The waves

from her legs agitated the whole pond as she swam wildly; sometimes she looked at the drake, sometimes at the fish, and between the looks she quacked as if she would die. Then she, too, got out and went toward the fish. I looked apprehensively at the figure by the woodpile, but it might have been a painted figure in very truth. I think Jimsy was holding his breath. When a moral conflict becomes visible to the naked eye there is something in it that far outmatches any mere thumping of fists; here was Sir Francis battling for his empire in silence and immobility, with his ladies getting all the fish. And just then the Countess wavered. She saw Sir Francis, white and monumental, thirty yards away; and she saw the Duchess and the fish about three more steps from her nose. She stood still and then she broke down. She turned and fled back to her lord. It cannot be known what the more forcible Duchess would have done but for this. As it was, she looked up and saw the Countess — and immediately went to pieces herself. I had not known that she had it in her to run so.

I cannot repeat Jimsy's first oath as he stared at the triumphant drake leading his family to

the haystack. After silence he turned to me. "Wouldn't that kill you?" he said very quietly; and said no more, but began to walk slowly away.

"Now," I called after him, "will you tell me how he manages to keep head of his house like that?"

If Jimsy had any hypothesis to offer then, he did not offer it, and before he had reached the corral May appeared. I'll not report her talk this time, it was the usual nursery governess affair: did Jimsy know that he had wasted half an hour when he ought to have hitched up and gone for wood up Dead Timber Creek, and didn't he know there was wood for just one day left and it would take him the whole day? I escaped to my fishing before she had done and I took my dinner with Scipio.

It is wicked to fish in October, but we ate the trout; and I must tell you of a discovery: when artificial flies fail, and frost has finished the grasshoppers, the housefly is a deadly bait! I am glad at last to have accounted for the presence of the housefly in a universe of infinite love.

At supper I was sorry that Scipio and I had not got off to the mountains that day. Jimsy was still out. He had brought, it appeared, one load

of wood from Dead Timber Creek and had gone for another. It was May's opinion that he should have returned by now. I hardly thought so, but this made small difference to May. She was up from table and listening at the open door three times before our restless meal was over. Next she lighted a lantern and hung it out upon a gate-post of one of the outer corrals, that Jimsy might be guided home from afar. In the following thirty minutes she went out twice again to listen and soon after this she sent me out to the lantern to make sure it was burning brightly.

"He would see the windows at any rate," I told her.

But now she had begun to be frightened and could not sit in her chair for more than a few moments at a time.

"What o'clock is it?" she asked me.

It was seven forty-five and I think she fancied it was midnight. If Jimsy had been six years old and a perfect fool to boot she could not have been more distracted than she presently became.

"Why, Mrs. Culloden," I remonstrated, "Jimsy was raised in this valley. He knows his way about."

She did not hear me and now she seized the

telephone. Into the ears of one neighbor after another she poured questions up and down the valley. It was idle to remind her that Dead Timber Creek was five miles to the south of us and that the Whitlows, who lived six miles to the north, were not likely to have seen Jimsy. The whole valley quickly learned that he had not come back with his second load of wood by eight o'clock and that she was asking them all if they knew anything about it. In the space of twenty minutes with the telephone she had made him ridiculous throughout the precinct; and then at ten minutes past eight, while she was ringing up her friend Mrs. Sedlaw for the second time, in came Jimsy. The wood and the wagon were safe in the corral, he was safe in the house and hungry; and, of course, she hadn't heard him arrive because of the noise of the telephone. He had been at the stable for the last ten minutes, attending to the horses.

"And you never had the sense to tell me!" she cried.

"Tell you what?" He had not taken it in. "Gosh, but that chicken looks good! What's that lantern out there for?" He was now seated and helping himself to the food.

"And that's all you've got to say to me!" she said. And then the deluge came — not of tears, but words.

Somewhere inside of Jimsy was an angel, whatever else he contained. Throughout that foolish, galling scene made in my presence before I could escape, never a syllable of what he must have been feeling came from him, but only good-natured ejaculations — not many and rather brief, to be sure. When he learned the reason for the lantern he laughed aloud. This set her off and she rushed into the story of her telephoning. Then, and then alone, it was on the verge of being too much for him. He laid down his knife and fork and leaned back for a second, but the angel won. He resumed his meal; only a brick-red sunset of color spread from his collar to his hair — and his eyes were not gray, but black.

That was what I saw after I had got away to my cabin and was in bed: the man's black eyes fixed on his plate and the pretty girl standing by the stove and working off her needless fright in an unbearable harangue.

Audibly I sighed, sighed with audible relief, when the Culloden Ranch lay a mile behind Scipio and me and our packhorses the next day. Jimsy

had been as self-controlled in the morning as on the night before — except that no man can control the color of his eyes. The murky storm that hung in Jimsy's eyes was the kind that does not blow over, but breaks. Was May blind to such a sign? At breakfast she told him that the next time he went for wood she would go to see that he got back for supper! I told Scipio that if things were not different when we returned I should move over to his cabin.

"You'd never have figured a girl could get Jimsy buffaloed!" said Scipio.

"He's not buffaloed a little bit," I returned.

"Ain't he goin' to do nothin'?"

"I don't know what he'll do."

Scipio rode for a while, thinking it over. "If I had a wife," he said, "and she got to thinkin' she was my mother, I'd take a dally with her." His meaning was not clear; but he made it so: "I'd take her — well, not *on* my knee, but acrost it."

This I doubted, but said nothing. By and by we were passing the Sedlaw Ranch and Mrs. Sedlaw came running out rather hastily — and began speaking before she reached the gate.

"Oh, howdy-do?" said she; and she stood looking at me.

"Isn't it perfect weather?" said I.

"Yes, indeed. And so you're going hunting?"

"Yes. Want to come?"

"Why, wouldn't that be nice! I thought Jimsy and May might be going with you."

"Oh, they're too busy. Good-by."

She stood looking after me for some time and I saw her walk back to the house quite slowly.

There's no need to tell of our hunting, or of the games of Cœur d'Alène Solo which Scipio and I and the useful cook played at night. In twenty days the snow drove us out of the mountains and we came down to human habitations — and to rife rumors. I don't recall what we heard at the first cabin — or the second or the others — but we heard something everywhere. The valley was agog over Jimsy and May. Amid the wealth of details, I shall never know precisely what did happen. Jimsy had left her and gone to Alaska. He hadn't gone to Alaska, but to New York, with Mrs. Faxon, the alfalfa widow. May had gone to her mother in Iowa. She hadn't gone to Iowa; she was under the protection of Mrs. Sedlaw. Jimsy and the widow were living in open shame at the ranch. The ranch was shut up and old man Birdsall had seen Jimsy in town, driving

a companion who wore splendid feathers. There was more, much more, but the only certainty seemed to be that Jimsy had broken loose and gone somewhere — and over this somewhere hovered an episodic bigamy. But where was Jimsy now? And May? Had the explosion blown them asunder forever? Was their marriage lying in fragments? On our last night in camp we talked of this more than we played Cœur d'Alène Solo. If anybody could tell me the true state of things it would be Mrs. Sedlaw, and at her door I knocked as I passed the next morning.

"Oh, howdy-do?" said I; and she sat looking at me for some moments.

"What luck?" said she. "Get an elk?"

"Yes," said I. "How are things in general?"

"Elegant," said she. "Give my love to dear May."

"Thank you," said I, not very appropriately.

The lady followed me to my horse. "Seems like only yesterday you came by," was her parting word. She had certainly squared our accounts.

As we drew in sight of the Culloden Ranch you may imagine how I wondered what we should find there. A peaceful smoke rose from the kitchen chimney into the quiet air. Through

the window I saw — yes, it was May! — most domestically preparing food. Outside by the pond a figure stood. It was Jimsy. He was feeding the ducks. I swung off my horse and hurried to Jimsy. Sir Francis was eating from his hand.

"How!" said he in cheerful greeting.

"How!" I returned.

"Get an elk?"

"Yes."

"Sheep?"

"Yes."

"Good!"

"You — you're — you're feeding the ducks."

"Sure thing! — Say, I've found out his game."

I pointed to Sir Francis. "His control, you mean? — how he keeps his hold?"

"Sure thing!" Jimsy pointed to the ducks. "Has 'em competin' for him. Keeps 'em a-guessing. That's his game."

It stunned me for a second. Of course he didn't know that the valley had talked to me.

"Why, how do you do?" cried May, cheerfully, coming out of the house.

Then I took it all in and I broke into scandalous, irredeemable laughter.

A bright flash came into Jimsy's eyes as *he* took it all in — then he also gave way, but he blushed heavily.

"Whatever are you two laughing at?" exclaimed May. She looked radiant. That clear note was all melted from her voice. "Mr. Le Moyne, aren't you going to stay to dinner?"

"Why, thank you!" said Scipio — polite, and embarrassed almost to stuttering.

To Sir Francis Jimsy gave the last piece of toast. It was a large one. If the drake was aware of the tie between Jimsy's marital methods and his own, he betrayed it as little as he betrayed knowledge of all things which it is best never to notice.

Yes, I am grateful to the game laws. The next legislature made them intelligible.

THE following pages contain advertisements of a few of the Macmillan novels.

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